

ガナッシュで最強

N E W S A G A

阿部正行
Abe Masayuki



アルファポリス

Tsuyokute New Saga (LN)

vol.1

by Masayuki Abe

[Novel Updates](#)

Translation Group:

[Light Novel Bastion](#)

[Defiring](#)

Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

Introduction



N E W S A G A

ジルグス王国

Sanguld Mountains

Arcane

Demon Territory

Station town

Saness Village

Mallad (The Capital)

Rimaze



Prologue

There exists a race of humans, elves, and dwarves who have the divine protection of the light gods.

Though outnumbered, the demons' individual powers were far stronger than the average human, for the demons had the blessing of darkness.

The two races divided the massive continent into east and west, and each side has been fighting with the other for thousands of years. However, the past 300 years have been unusually calm.

Part of this can be attributed to the rise of a more peaceful Demon King who replaced the previous ruler.

Intermittent conflicts existed, but they were negligible and the human race had become accustomed to the relative peace.

But that peace was broken by a new Demon King who ascended to the throne.

In the fifth month of the year 2826 on the Genesis Calendar, the demons began their assault on the humans in what would later be called the Great Invasion.

Showing no mercy, the demons were able to annihilate many countries controlled by the humans, who, at the time, were engaged in a civil conflict of their own..

The demons slaughtered anyone that resisted while those who surrendered were forced to enter the demons' territory as prisoners. It goes without saying that none of them were able to return.

Of course, the human race didn't just sit back and watch; they settled their differences and assembled an army of allied forces.

Under normal circumstances, they would have enough power to retaliate. Unfortunately, there was a struggle for power within the army and, being

unable to cooperate, were crushed.

In the fourth month of the following year, the Empire of Garugan was destroyed. Losing the largest source of their armed forces, the humans had no choice but to engage in an assault that was considered by most to be nothing short of suicidal.

The plan was as follows: the survivors will be gathered charge recklessly into the main battalion of the demon forces, and draw their attention.

While the demons are distracted, the elite soldiers selected from the battalion will sneak into the demon castle, their stronghold, and eliminate the root of the ongoing chaos: the Demon King.

Though the odds of the human race winning were very low, they had no other option.

The gamble paid off. Though it was a costly victory, they were nonetheless able to triumph through the war.



The deepest floor of the castle is the king's floor. For a floor located indoors, it was extraordinarily spacious and empty.

In fact, an entire town would fit in this empty floor.

If there was anything that stood out in all of this emptiness, it would be the altar in the center.

The intense battle that was being fought in front of the altar—the one in which the fate of the world depended on—had just finished.

There was only one person standing and that was Kyle, the magic swordsman of the human race.

Strapped up in silver armor, he had wounds scattered across his entire body.

His left arm was almost torn off and was of little use.

But Kyle stood there, cautiously watching the Demon King slump forward.

After he confirmed the incapacitation of the Demon King, he sat down on the ground, as if all of his energy had been drained.

“This is it...it’s over...”

The drawback of the demons being stronger individually was that they have a tendency to be self-centered.

Loosely banded together by a charismatic boss, they were nothing without their leader.

Many lives were lost in the battle, but the humans outnumbered the demons to begin with. Demon casualties were also great, so it was highly unlikely that they would invade again.

Even with a victory, Kyle was not happy. The sacrifices and losses were just too great.

He looked at his sword, or whatever part remained of it.

To Kyle, the sword was of significant sentimental value, but now, only the handle was left.

He stared at the tightly closed door that led outside.

His comrades who withheld the pursuing attackers and promised to catch up later never made it.

He looked at the Cane of the Tree of Life, laying on the floor in the distance.

It belonged to a shaman elf who had fought with him up to this point. She gave up her life to protect Kyle, and perished.

Remembering the last time she smiled, a tear rolled down his face.

All of the things he wanted to protect no longer existed: his hometown, his family, his friends, his comrades, and his love...were all lost.

There was neither joy nor satisfaction. There was only sadness, accompanied by a sense of solitude. Even his yearning for revenge, the only emotion that allowed Kyle to push this far, was gone.

The lacerations across his body, if left untreated, would be fatal, but even that didn’t bother him at this point.

Thinking that all he had to do was lie down and patiently wait for death, he did just that and gently closed his eyes.

If he proceeded to lose consciousness, everything would end there.

Was it coincidence? Or was it fate? The black feathers that were growing on the wings of the Demon King floated down and landed gently onto Kyle's face.

As Kyle's consciousness was on the verge of being devoured by the darkness, he woke up, and opened his eyes slightly. His eyes focused on one of the only noticeable things in the room: the altar.

There was a red light.

"What is that?"

Using what felt like every bit of his remaining energy, he sat up and dragged his limp body towards the altar.

The altar was decorated with a blood-red gem, the size of an infant's clenched fist. The gem emitted a red light and seemed to pulse as it did so.

As a magician himself, Kyle knew the tremendous power stored within the gem.

"Could this be...a magic item?"

Magic items are what you'd expect them to be; a tool with a specific magic spell contained inside.

In retrospect, during the fight, there were numerous times when the Demon King deliberately received attacks that he could've easily evaded, as if he were protecting something.

This proved to be decisive in winning the battle.

"Is this what he was protecting the entire time?"

He suddenly recalled the Demon King looking at the altar in his final moments, instead of at Kyle, who dealt the fatal blow.

The light emitted from the gem was growing stronger. It was as if power of an unprecedented magnitude was trying to find its way out.

"Now that the Demon King is dead, has the magic in the stone become uncontrollable?"

It turns out the magic was still in the process of forming itself. Sooner or later

it will explode, and cause mass destruction.

In hindsight, it is hard to justify Kyle's actions.

Was he drawn by the beauty of the suspicious stone?

Or did he just want to die and be at peace quickly?

Either way, he simply grabbed the stone.

It was at that moment. There was a massive explosion of red light that instantly engulfed Kyle and his surroundings.

And then...Kyle knew nothing anymore.

Chapter 1

Kyle was woken up by a gentle ray of warm light shining upon his face.

“... Where am I?”

His voice cracked. He looked around as he got up.

It wasn't a completely new environment; rather, for him, it was one of his most familiar places.

On the wall hung a model sword given to him by his father, and on the shelf were books recommended to him by his mother. The desk and chair were just as he had left them, and the bed he was currently lying on was surely one that he had used before.

There was no mistake; this was the place he had spent most of his life. He was in his hometown, which was supposed to have been destroyed a year ago by the demon invasion.

“What is going on...?”

Perhaps it was because he had just regained consciousness; he was still trying to understand the situation. As he struggled, Kyle heard thumping on his door and a bright voice screeching.

“How long are you going to sleep? Wake up already!”

A young girl in her mid-teens entered the room. Her hair was long, red, and wavy; her movements, full of life. Just watching her supplied plenty of energy.

“Lize...”

He muttered the name of an old, childhood playmate. The two spent the majority of their lives together, and after the invasion they were never supposed to have been able to see each other again.

“Oh, you're awake. Geez...You turn 16 today. Act like it.”

She arrogantly placed her hands on her hips.

She had been like this since she was young. The two were around the same

age, but because she was born a few months earlier, Lize treated Kyle like a little brother.

Kyle sat there for a few moments, still overcome with surprise at what was unfolding in front of him.

“Oh...it’s just a dream.”

He snapped back into reality and let out a weak laugh.

It was a very happy, yet cruel dream.

If this dream was a final reward for saving the world, it was too brutal.

The bygone days of peace... The irreplaceable days that had been taken for granted.

It didn’t matter even if it was just an illusion... if only time could be reversed...

“Kyle?”



Lize called out to him after noticing his strange behavior, but Kyle ignored her, got up from the bed, and approached her.

“What happened?”

A baffled Lize asked again, except this time, Kyle was so close that he could feel her breath.

Ignoring her for the second time, Kyle embraced Lize in his arms before she could say anything more.

“K-K-K-Kyle?!”

“Lize! Lize! Lize!”

He repeatedly called her name, wishing that this moment would last indefinitely, and strengthened his grip on her.

“Hey, hey, hey, hold up! What’s going on here?!”

Lize fumbled her arms as he locked his arms around her, but the confusion made her efforts futile.

“Oh... umm...”

Lize’s resistance dwindled, and her face flashed a bright red color.

Kyle noticed the awkwardness only after a while.

Her warm body, the scent of her perfume radiating from her hair, and her whispers all awakened his senses.

“Huh?”

For a dream, this was quite realistic.

To confirm *something*, Kyle slid his left hand downwards.

“Wha!?”

Lize’s body jolted in response.

“Huh?”

Kyle unintentionally rubbed that soft, warm, *thing*.

“Eh!? Ah? N..no...h..hey!”

Lize, clearly confused, let out a cry.

Kyle distinctly remembered Lize having an inferiority complex due to having a bigger ass than other girls in the same age group.

During this entire time, Kyle was forgetting about something.

He had just woken; physiologically, a certain *part* of his body was “filled with energy.”

Rubbing a girl’s ass didn’t help the situation; that *part* of his body was gaining even more “energy.”

The worst part was probably the fact that he was hugging her tight. Lize had undoubtedly noticed his “energized” body part. It would have been hard to miss, considering that he was pressing *it* against her body.

Lize’s red face turned pale in an instant.

“N... NOOOOOOOO!!!”

Kyle’s grip was forcefully shaken off. Lowering her body, Lize was able to use her wrist like a whip. Gathering power from her toes, she twisted her waist, smacked Kyle at an incredible angle using her entire body, sending him flying towards a bookshelf.

Kyle was flung in the air, spinning like a top and finally smashing into the shelf with incredible force.

“What are you trying to do first thing in the morning!! You idiot!”

Lize screamed at him with teary eyes before walking out, slamming the door violently behind her.

Kyle was buried under the books, now fully away due to the pain that stretched from his face to his neck. He was finally able to sense what was going on.

“Eh... This isn’t a dream?”

At that moment, Kyle’s right fist, which was clenched tightly since the moment he woke up, slowly opened.

The blood-red gem that Kyle found on the altar fell to the floor, making a

sound.

“This isn’t a dream...”

He leaned backwards towards the bed while massaging his neck that was now in excruciating pain.

“There’s no way a dream could be *this* painful...but if that’s the case...then what is going on here?”

Though he was fully conscious, he was still unable to comprehend the situation.

For sure, he had been in the demon’s lair, battled with the demon and barely managed to emerge victorious. He had suffered a near-fatal blow... If this wasn’t a dream, then what could possibly explain the situation?

“I’m not hypnotized or hallucinating. That kind of stuff doesn’t work on me anyways... Even if I was under a spell, this shouldn’t be happening.”

After thinking this through, he checked his left arm. If he remembered correctly, his left arm had suffered a massive blow, and it should be almost falling off.

“It’s healed... no... it can’t be.”

With that much damage, even the highest level of healing magic would render it useless for a while and scars would definitely remain. From his experience, he was sure of this.

But his left arm was clean. No discomfort or disability at all. It was as if his arm had never even wounded.

The other wounds across his body were also gone. He moved his body slightly, and noticed it was in extremely good condition. The pain and dullness from earlier had also vanished.

After spending some time thinking, Kyle stepped out of his room.

The arrangement of the rooms was just as he remembered. The more he looked around, the more he became sure that it was his own house. He glanced at his reflection in the mirror inside the reception room.

“I knew it... I look younger.”

During the ongoing battles with the demons, he had completely forgotten about his birthday. But he was sure he was at least twenty years old. But the reflection in the mirror only showed a young boy in his mid-teens. No cuts or scrapes anywhere.

There could be only explanation for this.

“... Is this the past? Have I gone back in time?”

He took out the red stone from his pocket. It looked the same as when he first picked it up near the altar. It was beautiful, shiny and unlike anything else in this world. But, unlike when he had first picked it up, he could no longer feel its magical powers.

“That can’t be... There’s no magic spell to turn back time... but is there another explanation...?”

Kyle held his head for a while, but snapped back when his stomach made a sound. He let out a dry laugh.

“I suppose hunger affects everyone, regardless of their situation... On the bright side, it proves that I’m normal.”

Hoping to find some food, he walked towards the kitchen and found just that.

On the table were some meat, fresh bread, vegetable soup, scrambled eggs, salad, and fruits. For a breakfast service, this was quite a luxurious meal.

“Lize must have prepared this.”

Kyle and his family hated chores, so Lize often cooked for them. They couldn’t complain to her because she did all of the cooking.

He grabbed some food and shoved it in his mouth. The taste was nostalgic. Though he hadn’t been able to eat this kind of food for the past year, he had never forgotten the taste.

“I must eat it... before it gets cold...”

He began to violently stuff food in his mouth, trying to fight back tears.

“As expected, I ate too much...”

Looking at the empty plate, he let out a laugh. It was clear that he was in pain from overeating.

“I probably should’ve noticed *before* eating, but... this amount of food... there’s no way this was made for one person.”

Just then, he heard a noise from the entrance, and noticed someone coming in.

He was alarmed for second, but recognized who it was instantly.

The sound of the footsteps sounded familiar to him as they headed straight for the kitchen.

“What’s up~”

The guy who entered had short blonde hair and was well-groomed. He looked like a neighborhood delinquent who had just grown up.

He was wearing comfortable clothes and had a cheap sword holstered on his waist.

“Seran...”

Seran, like Lize, was an inseparable childhood friend of Kyle, except he was a delinquent.

This relationship lasted until their final moments.

“W... What a surprise. You’re usually terrible with mornings, but you’re up early today.”

“Y-y-yeah... Umm... How are you feeling these days?”

“Are you outta your mind? I saw you yesterday.”

Seran seemed perplexed.

Kyle took a deep breath and looked closely at Seran’s face... Something was definitely not right.

“The dumb look on your face is the same... but the Seran I know of had an exceptionally stupid look. The one standing in front of me now looks exactly like the blockhead I knew when I was a kid. Just bigger...”

“I’m having trouble understanding, but I know you’re making fun of me.”

Plus... he looked younger.

He was probably the same age as Kyle.

He hadn’t noticed it before, but Lize had also looked younger than he remembered.

“Anyways, I don’t have time to deal with you right now. Time to eat breakfast...wait...where’s the food!?”

Seran was shocked to see the empty bowl.

“You ate everything again!?”

“Well, it was good...”

Kyle remembered Seran coming over just to get food.

“Damn. I knew Lize had been preparing something since yesterday, so I was gonna come over to get a share... That girl is savage, but so are her cooking skills, so I was pretty excited.”

Seran couldn’t bear it. He started scraping out the leftovers from inside the bowl.

“Hey, I hope you don’t mind me asking a weird question... but... what year and day is it today?”

“Huh? What a strange question. It’s the 24th of May, 2823.”

As Kyle had expected... Four years ago. It seemed that he really had gone back in time.

“Are you sure? Really?”

“Why do you ask? I’m quite sure I know the date...”

Seran then clapped his hands once, as if he had an epiphany.

“Right! Today is your birthday. I completely forgot about your birthday. You wanted me to celebrate or something?”

“Nah, don’t worry, I’m not interested in you celebrating my birthday.”

After Seran finished whatever remained in the bowl, he looked towards Kyle

and said:

“Fine. I suppose I’ll let you take all the food in the bowl for breakfast today since it’s your birthday.”

“Cheap bastard. You weren’t even the one who made it!”

Seran turned to leave, completely ignoring Kyle’s remarks.

“Where are you going?”

“If there’s no food, I have no reason to be here. I’m going over to Lize’s to see if I can get something.”

As he left, he muttered something along the lines of Lize’s food always being bomb: “If I get on my knees and beg, then I’m sure she’ll cook something up for me! I know she’s got a sweet spot somewhere.”

He wasn’t shy at all.

“Ever since you were a kid, if you wanted something, you’d forget about pride, and would do anything it took to get it.”

“Quit complimenting me. You’re making me blush.”

“I’m not. Get over yourself.”

“Just a reminder, my birthday is on the 2nd of August. If you wanna know what I want for a present, I request either some gold or a pretty girl.”

Kyle let out a dry laugh as he watched him walk out the door.

It had been a while since he had a conversation like this.

It used to be a dull part of his daily routine, but with everything that happened, he realized that he had taken it for granted.

“Well... What should I do know...?”

It seemed certain that he was in the past, but he had yet to figure out exactly how he had got here.

He wanted to seek advice, but he also didn’t want to tell some random person about what had been happening.

“I know there’s only one person whose advice I can seek... if she’s awake.”

Scratching his head, he walked out and headed towards her house.

The Lenard House that Kyle belongs to was located near the Rimaze area of the Zilgs Kingdom, and was known to be quite a large estate. It was three floors high and boasted an enormous lawn as well. Kyle headed towards a shack located to the side of the lawn.

The shack was made of sturdy stone with a flat roof and didn't have a single window. The moment someone stepped inside, they were forced to walk down a steep flight of stairs.

A nostalgic scent reached Kyle's nose as he opened the door to the basement.

The narrow room contained bookshelves packed full with literature.

On the wall with no windows, there was a magic tool with semi-permanent "Light" magic stored inside.

This was a custom-made tool designed to keep the lighting adjusted, ensuring that the books were not damaged.

This archive utilized unimaginable magic to keep the lighting and humidity in ideal conditions, though it came with an unimaginable price tag.

The archives were home to everything from children's books to forbidden literature from the ancient periods when demons ruled.

In the center of the room was a table with stacks of books piled on it.

The woman who was half-buried in what seemed like a mountain of books noticed Kyle entering, looked up, and gave a grin.

"Oh, it's you Kyle. What brings you here at this hour?"

She's here.

He had a feeling she would be here, but for some reason, actually seeing her was emotional for him.

"It's already morning. Were you reading all night again, Mom?"

"Eh? Oh... It's already morning? ... I knew I'd lose track of time here."

The woman who let out a yawn while saying that was Kyle's mother, Seraiya.

With a childish face, short hair, small body, she looked much younger than she really was.

She was well into her thirties, but if she stood next to Kyle one would have guessed they were siblings.

“I got a question. Do you have time?”

Seraiya looked at her son with a confused face.

“You wanting to ask about something is quite rare... If you want to know about how I met your father, I can talk all day long. It was twenty years ago when...”

“We can talk about that next time.”

Kyle stopped his mother, who was eager to talk about it.

Whenever Kyle’s mother would talk about how she met Kyle’s father, the conversation would last hours. Kyle had been traumatized by it ever since he was young.

“I wanted to ask you about magic.”

“About magic? Would I know enough to answer your question?”

“I don’t know of anyone who knows about it as much as you do, mom.”

There were three main types of magic.

Sacred magic that borrows the power of gods and causes miracles.

Spiritual magic that uses Earth, Water, Wind, and Fire.

And finally, ancient magic which uses knowledge to a great extent in its formation.

The human race mostly used sacred magic and ancient magic, but Seraiya was a user of ancient magic.

Magic was further divided into six categories: lowest-level magic, low-level magic, intermediate-level magic, advanced-level magic, highest-level magic, and special-class magic.

A title was given to each magician depending on the type of magic they could

use.

The lowest-level magicians were called Magicians. Low-level magicians were called Sorcerers. Intermediate-level magicians were called Wizards. Advanced-level magicians were called Mages. The highest-level magicians were referred to as Archmages.

There are only a handful of people who had the ability to use special-class magic, so they were often given individual titles.

A famous example would be the Sakira, Queen of the Sula Kingdom, who had the title Glorious.

Saraiya was also an Archmage.

Though the truth can be disputed, Seraiya was the youngest magician to ever be recommended as the Court Mage of the Garugan Empire.

Now, she was using the money she earned and the resources she had inherited from Kyle's grandfather, who had died before Kyle was born, to invest in her hobby of collecting books.

Kyle didn't know why she lived in such a remote area, and she kept changing the subject whenever he brought it up.

But there was no better person to ask about magic than her.

"Umm... Is there such thing as a magic spell to go back in time?"

"There is."

Seraiya answered his question with ease.

"R-really?!"

"Yeah, although it's not widely known, there are spells that interfere with time."

"But I didn't even know they exist. Seems like such a convenient... I mean... unfair magic"

"Of course. It's because not everyone has the ability to use that kind of magic. If I were to go into details, it'd take days, so I'll just stick to saying that theories of time-meddling magic has already been proved. The reason many people

can't use that magic is simply because of the amount of magic power involved."

Magic power was the source of energy that every magician possessed, allowing them to cast spells.

"If we were to rank the spell that turns back time based on the 6 categories in existence, it would probably belong ten ranks above the special-level magic. Forget humans; not even dragons or gods can use that kind of magic. If time were a large river, then a human would be the size of an ant. Do you think an ant could do anything about a large, flowing river? Even if the greatest magician in history were to sacrifice a part of his lifespan in order to cast that spell, he would only be able to change a few moments."

This was why Seraiya had said there are only a handful of people who even knew this spell.

"I see... So what would need to happen for time to turn back several *years*?"

"Years? That would require the use of tremendous magic power. No matter how you consider it, gathering that much power seems impossible."

She shook her head, as if to say it would be useless to even think about turning back time several years.

"What if... a magic item was used?"

Seraiya reacted to Kyle's question with an "Ah."

"I see, that's interesting. Magic items can store magic power... It'll take time and effort, but if you were to use a spell like that, the use of magic items would be a good option."

Seraiya thought about it for a while, but shook her head once again.

"I'm thinking about it, but there are too many problems. First, you would need to acquire the magic power before storing it. It'd take some effort, but you'd be able to gather some over time. But to turn back time by several years, it'd take over a thousand years to gather the magic power, even for an Archmage."

"... What if a forbidden ritual was performed?"

Seraiya's face went dim.

“I suppose employing such methods would allow one to gather tremendous power... Where did you learn about that?”

The forbidden ritual was basically a sacrifice. It involved sacrificing portions of one’s life in exchange for magic power. Doing so allowed one to gather an immense amount of magic power. Performing the forbidden ritual did not cost any magic power to the user, so that wouldn’t be a problem.

There had once been a magician who joined the dark side and sacrificed an entire village, just to test some magic.

Thus, the existence of the forbidden ritual wasn’t widely known.

“I was just reading a book. I don’t know too much about it.”

In the horrifying battles that Kyle had experienced, the humans who were being decimated by the demons had no choice but to resort to this forbidden practice as a tactic to ward off the enemy.

In fact, they were so overwhelmed that they didn’t have time to use this spell. This was the reason the humans had resorted to reckless charges in the end.

“I see... but even if you used the forbidden ritual, it wouldn’t be possible. If you were to turn back time for several years, you would need a tremendous amount of magic power; at least half of the people on this continent would have to sacrifice themselves.”

“... Right... There’s no way to have half the human population to create such a magic tool.”

In other words, with half the human population, casting such a spell wouldn’t be impossible.

Kyle remembered the piles of bodies that had surrounded the demon king’s castle.

They were what was left of the enslaved humans. The lives of these people had been drained out of them to create magic power.

“Another problem would be a catalyst. With an ordinary spell, you’d be able to use just about any magic stone or jewel lying around. But with spells of such large magnitude, you’d need something that would be able to withstand the

tremendous energy. I don't know if such a catalyst exists."

There were objects called magic stones, which were usually special gems that absorbed magic power.

Each magic stone had a limit on how much magic power it could absorb. If the limit was exceeded, the gemstone would break and the magic would become wild and explode.

"The only thing coming anywhere near being capable of storing such power would be the Heart of Shinryu."

As Seraiya mentioned the Heart of Shinryu, she began to dig through the mountain of books piled onto her desk, and picked out one old book. In her mind, each book was placed in a specific location, and she knew where everything belonged.

"Ah, this is the one. This is the Heart of Shinryu."

In the book she was holding, there was a legend on the Heart of Shinryu, along with a picture of it.

Once upon a time, there was a powerful dragon whose powers were much stronger than any of the gods.

The remains of the dragon contained a residue that was more powerful than any god that had ever lived. The person who got his hands on this was Zares.

Zares succeeded in extracting the Heart of Shinryu from the remains.

With a seemingly endless supply of magic power at his disposal, Zares was able to prosper for a thousand years.

However, after a thousand years, the magic power of the Heart of Shinryu went dry.

That was how Zares was destroyed.

"Anyways, the stone is now dry, but it could be filled with magic power again. It would be an amazing tool. When Zares was destroyed, it went missing. It's been about a thousand years since it happened. I wonder if it's still around. It's possible that the Heart of Shinryu belongs to the demons."

“I... I see...”

Kyle was subconsciously gripping the stone in his pocket.

The stone that resembled the picture right in front of him.

“So basically, if we were to turn back time a few years, we would have to use the Heart of Shinryu and sacrifice half the human population?”

“Exactly. See? Impossible right?”

“Well... Yeah... That would be... impossible...”

Kyle shifted his gaze away from Seraiya.

“You’re asking very strange questions. It’s as if you came from the future.”

“Hahaha what are you talking about; that’s nonsense.”

“I suppose it is.”

The two laughed (though Kyle’s was more of a forced laugh).

“It’s been a while since I’ve spoken to you, Kyle-chan.”

“It has...?”

“Definitely. It's obvious that you’ve been avoiding me these days.”

“Ah~ I had no intention of avoiding you....”

In his mind, Kyle knew Seraiya was right.

Starting from right around this time, Kyle had avoided his mother for no particular reason.

Maybe it was puberty, but in hindsight, he still didn’t know why he had avoided her.

“I was very lonely. I felt like I had failed as a mother, being hated by my own son.”

“Ah~ Well, Mom, you neither act nor look like a mother... You’re always at home and have no interests besides books. You’re terrible with housekeeping chores and you don’t take part in anything that a normal mother would. You probably don’t meet the general standard of being a mother.”

“I had a feeling that that was the case. But it really pains me because I didn’t expect my own son to be this straightforward about it to me.”

“Still, you’re my one and only mother, and there’s no other mother in the world that’s better than you.”

“How charming of you.”

Seraiya hugged Kyle with a large smile on her face.

Kyle was much taller than Seraiya, so it was more like Seraiya hugging *onto* Kyle. Normally, Kyle would just break away, but today, he was trying hard to fight back the tears of nostalgia and happiness.

“All this talking made me hungry. If I remember, Lize-chan is supposed to make food today. She’s really good at cooking you know.”

As Kyle saw Seraiya happily head towards Kyle’s house, excited to see what food will be served, his face cramped up.

“Oh... Umm... I’m sorry. I ate everything.”

Seraiya’s face froze over.

“... I see... Well... That’s unfortunate... I’ll just stick to preserved food like usual then... hehehe...”

“Ok... I mean... I’m sorry...”

“No no, it’s fine. I just remembered. It’s Kyle-chan’s birthday today. I’ll just give you breakfast as a birthday present hehehe.”

“Why is everyone giving me that breakfast as a birthday present?”

Chapter 2

To the east of Rimaze was a small hill. On top of it was a decayed remain of some sort.

Though the remains were decayed, most of the stones were intact, so it was a popular play area for children.

Kyle also used to play hide-and-seek here.

Kyle climbed to the top of the remains and watched the sunset.

From the top, one could get a panoramic view of the entire town, and Kyle came here often to watch the sunset.

It's the first time since the town was decimated that Kyle was able to watch the sunset in peace.

As the sun was setting, Kyle watched the entire town from the hilltop and said to himself, "I never thought I'd be able to see the sunset like this. I've lost count at how many times I've almost cried today."

Kyle almost let a tear drop as he reached into his pocket and took out the Heart of Shinryu.

"I wonder what he was trying to do by going back in time..."

He was thinking about the demon king.

"To...re...start..."

Kyle muttered, as he stared at the red Heart of Shinryu.

"There you are! I was looking for you!"

Startled by the sudden voice coming from behind, Kyle shoved the Heart of Shinryu back into his pocket.

He knew without turning around that it was Lize.

He would even know how she was feeling from the tone of her voice; he thought about what had happened this morning.

(He had suddenly hugged her first thing in the morning, groped her, and

shoved his crotch onto her body) “I’m sorry.”

He said this the moment he turned around and got on his knees and apologized.

You could look at this morning’s incident in any way, and he’d still look like a sex offender who could have been put in jail.

“I see you’re reflecting on what you’ve done.”

“I saw a weird dream and was totally out of it. I regret what I did.”

Kyle repeatedly apologized as his face was kept planted on the ground. Lize let out a big sigh.

Kyle took this to be a sign of Lize forgiving him, and relaxed his body.

“You two should really just stop doing stupid stuff if you’re gonna regret it later on.”

“Us two? ...Oh... you mean me and Seran. I’m guessing he went to your place?”

“Yeah, he did. And he apologized just like you. Face on the ground. You two act just like each other.”

Lize sat next to Kyle, obviously appalled.

Kyle also fixed his posture and the two watched the sunset together.

“I hope you’re not insulting me by putting me on the same level as him...But did you make him some food afterwards?”

“I couldn’t help not feeling sorry for the guy...Anyways, did you seriously eat everything? I prepared at least four servings.”

“Yeah...I couldn’t help it. It’s been at least one year since I ate food as good as that.”

“I’m quite sure I made the same thing 10 days earlier...And it’s not just Seran who came over but Seraiya also came over asking me to make something...I really felt bad...”

“...I’m sorry my mother caused so much trouble...I really am...”

Kyle sincerely apologized.

“Until Uncle Loeil comes back, I have no choice but to go and make food for you guys. Be thankful.”

“Loe...?...Oh~ my father. Right, he’s away right now. I forgot about that.”

He had completely forgotten about his father.

Loeil was an artisan; he crafted rings and necklaces. He’s highly skilled, but takes forever to craft the items, so very few people know how skilled he truly is.

He’s always quiet and is silent even when he laughs.

He takes over the household chores since Seraiya and Kyle don’t do much. Loeil was the epitome of a stay-at-home husband.

Sometimes he would take a few days to go to the capital to deliver his goods. That’s probably what he’s doing right now.

“Don’t tell me you just forgot about him.

“That’s blasphemy. I just couldn’t remember off the top of my head. That’s all. Anyways...”

Ending the conversation about his father with a simple “anyways,” Kyle went back to talking about other things.

“I’m surprised you knew I was here.”

“I know exactly what you’re thinking...Anyways, what was the weird dream you had this morning?”

Lize’s words wiped the smile off of Kyle’s face.

“By any chance, did I die in your dream?”

“Well, I suppose you could put it that way...”

“That explains why you seemed so disturbed...”

She seemed uninterested, but at the same time, she also seemed a bit happy.

Kyle thought about the part where Lize died in his dreams.

One year ago, or three years later in terms of the present circumstances, this town was taken over instantly by demons, since it was very close to the border.

Since it was the first invasion, the demons showed no mercy. Everything was destroyed and burned; the people were all slaughtered.

The town in front of his eyes transformed into a living hell.

He couldn't forget about what had happened, no matter how hard he tried.

And Lize...

By the time he got there, it was too late; nothing could be done to save her.

In her final moments, she was still smiling, and he could feel her getting colder by the moment.

He called out to her until his throat was sore, but she would never open her eyes again.

Just thinking about it made him angry.

And he made a promise to avenge her death.

"Wha...what's wrong? You seem a bit pale."

Hearing Lize's voice, Kyle snapped back into reality.

"N...nothing..."

"And you're sweating..."

"I just felt a little sick. That's all. It's nothing serious."

"Oh...okay...that's fine then..."

Though she says it's fine, Lize was worried about Kyle's sudden change of behavior.

To be exact, Lize was afraid.

She had never seen Kyle like this before. It wasn't exactly anger or sadness or hate. It was a feeling that couldn't be put to words. She sensed something dark in Kyle's expression.

She thought she knew everything about Kyle. What she just saw overturned her confidence.

Kyle thought about the miraculous nature of peace.

(Actually, it's peaceful now...but this peace will end in three years. I'm the only one who knows this, and if I do nothing, the tragedy will repeat itself...I'll be forced to go through hell all over again) "...no way I'm letting that happen"

"Wh...what's up with you?"

Lize called out to Kyle, who suddenly stood up, but Kyle ignored it, and just gazed at the sunset.

If nothing is changed, he would lose his family. His home. The world. And his childhood friend who is sitting right next to him.

Kyle clenched his teeth hard.

"I'm going to change it...."

He was filled with regret.

When it was hopeless, he remembered someone say this: "It's just fate. It's useless trying to fight it."

And just like that, he was persuaded into accepting fate.

"I'll change fate."

He can start now, and prevent the tragedy.

He would never let go of this opportunity.

"I'm going to change the fate of the entire world."

He swore to this, and held out his tightly clenched fist towards the west, where the sun was setting, and also where the demons lived.

"No matter what happens!"

It's the second time Kyle was so determined. The last time was when he lost Lize a year ago.

Except last time, it was for revenge; this time, it was to protect.

Lize rolled her eyes at Kyle, who out of nowhere, stood up and started yelling at the sun.

(What the hell is he talking about? He's talking nonsense all of a sudden.) Kyle just began talking about fate and changing the world. It's felt like a close

childhood friend whom she knew everything about, suddenly went far away.

And not just far away: far away into a forbidden place.

In a different sense, Lize was afraid again, and said to Kyle as if she realized something new: “Maybe I hit you too hard this morning.”

Lize was flustered and turned blue.

“W....w...w.....w.....what do I do....in these situations.....m...maybe if I hit him again...it’ll fix him.”

Burning with passion, Kyle didn’t realize that an equally determined Lize was standing right behind him.



“I wonder what happened.”

The next morning, Kyle faced towards his desk and thought about the previous day's events.

He swore he would save the world, but he had no idea how he would do it.

First, he would need to speak the truth. The entire truth.

He needed to tell everyone that he came from four years in the future, and that the people would need to defend themselves from the demons, who would launch a full-fledged assault in three years. He needed the people to hear his voice.

“...There's no way anyone would believe me. Had I not experienced it myself, I would probably shrug it off as well.”

Rationally, it would be impossible.

Being laughed wasn't the worst thing that could happen; he would be seen as a crazy person and would be isolated from society. The worst-case scenario is that he would be accused of being a spy for the demons by attempting to disrupt the harmony. In that case, he would be executed.

Even if a few people believed his story, it wouldn't make a difference.

It would be of no use unless he could convince the entire human race.

The reason why the human race was driven to near-extinction was clear.

“...The initial response was terrible. The humans were completely off guard and there was no system of cooperation.”

Had they cooperated, it wouldn't have been an easy win, but at least it would have been an even fight.

If the humans are able to strengthen their defenses and prepare for a great invasion, they would be able to avoid mass destruction.

But, given the current situation, that seems impossible.

To begin, the humans, who comprise the largest group of the human race, are not grouped well. Territorial issues among different countries, economic inequality, religious issues...there is no end to the issues that are hampering

cooperation.

Small clashes have been occurring, and in fact, had the demon race not existed, the humans would be in an all-out civil war.

The other portion of the human race known as the Ajin, comprised of elves and dwarves, are also struggling to cooperate.

Grouping them together and making them cooperate won't be an easy task.

"Instead of one big invasion, it would've been better if they came in frequent waves. Maybe then, the human race would have realized that there was a serious threat."

They would realize that they needed to set aside their differences to ward off a common enemy.

Elves live for around a thousand years. In that same time span, humans would go through multiple generations. Demons have been an enemy of the humans for thousands of years, but without experiencing an actual threat, the heightened security begins to wear off.

An alternate plan would be to step into demon territory and kill the demon king, who would ascend to the throne in three years.

The great invasion was ordered by this upcoming king, so if he can be eliminated, then in theory, there would be no invasion.

"The problem with this plan...is that it's virtually impossible to carry out."

First, not much is known about the demon king. Only his appearance from the final battle is known. Other than that, not even his name is known. With just this much information, finding him in vast enemy territory would be impossible.

Furthermore, in the rare chance that he is found, whether he can be killed is a completely separate issue.

When the humans stormed the main castle, there was a force of at least 100 elites chosen from the human race that made it this far. Less than 10 made it to the king's layer, and only Kyle was standing in the end.

Luck was the only thing that could explain all of this. It was a battle that was barely won, and nobody would do it ever again if asked.

Kyle took a deep breath, rested his head on his desk, and pondered about it.

“I’m starting to feel that stopping the invasion on my own is probably impossible...what else can I do...”

He then changed some of his ideas and thought about what he could do right now, in the present circumstances.

Kyle took a booklet that was lying on his desk into his hands.

“One advantage I have...is that my memory is above average. For that, I’m thankful.”

Indeed, the largest advantage he could ever have, is the fact that he knew everything that was going to happen.

In the booklet, he had written all the things that were going to happen in the next four years.

Of course, he didn’t recall every little detail, but just thinking about it a little produced a lot of material.

He spent all day yesterday writing everything he could remember.

He didn’t know which information would be of use, so he wrote everything from the situation of each country, method of attacks, weather, and food. If he could make use of the information, then a lot could be accomplished.

Another advantage he had was his strength. During the battle with the demon king, Kyle was the most powerful magic swordsman...but...

Kyle glances over at his thin arms.

“I have to keep track of my health too...”

“O...Oh, hey Kyle. Good morning. It’s great that you woke up on your own today.”

Feeling hungry, he headed over to the kitchen, and was greeted by Lize, who once again had prepared some food.

Seraiya, who had already started to eat and had a mouth stuffed with food, greeted Kyle with a barely understandable “good morning.”

“Good morning to both of you. By the way mom, talking with your mouth full

probably isn't the best thing to do."

Kyle also noted that she had jam all around her mouth.

"The food's gonna get cold, so hurry and eat!"

Lize pulls the chair and makes Kyle sit.

"Thanks...by the way Lize, you seem absurdly nice since yesterday."

Kyle spend the entire day holed up in his room yesterday, but Lize kept making excuses to come in and talk to him, asking if he was thirsty, if there was anything he needed, *etc.*

She was being nice as if she was talking to a child, sick person, or even an elderly person.

"That's nonsense. Oh, that piece of bread is big and hard. Let me cut it for you."

She didn't want him to choke on the bread. It's almost as if she was nursing for him.

Maybe she really thought blasting Kyle into the bookshelf screwed up his mind.

After he had completely woken up, Lize took him to the Our Lady of the Earth Church and had some healing magic casted on him.

"By the way Kyle-chan, are you going to stay in your room all day today too? It's not good for your health you know?"

"Nah, I'm going to go out. I want to practice my sword skills."

Mother knows best. He knew he had to go out.

"It's been a while since you've taken a swing with your sword, hasn't it?"

"Yeah, it's strange that you've decided to go practice all on your own. What happened?"

Lize and Seraiya both seem confused.

"I just need to take a break. That's all."

With a piece of bread in his mouth, Kyle thought to himself about how he's

been slacking off recently.

On the ruins in the outskirts of town, Kyle was completely focused on swinging his sword.

He wasn't just randomly swinging the sword. He mixed it up with an occasional feint, and finished with a coup de grâce. He would sometimes move as if he "received" an attack with his sword.

There was nobody near Kyle. But in Kyle's eyes, he saw one target; an enemy that he intended to kill. It was a technique called Gentohō, taught to him by his master. Basically, he would cast a spell of illusion and hypnosis on himself. The result would be a phantom enemy that could also receive and return attacks.

More practice with this technique allows the user to create an enemy that closely resembles the real thing. In short, for those with magic power, this was a very effective training method.

In most cases, one would have to actually know the enemy to a great extent to cast an image that accurately reflects the enemy, but Kyle was experienced so a single battle was enough to get an accurate representation.

The enemy Kyle created in his mind was the demon king: one of the strongest enemies he has ever known.

"Damn...I'd be killed every 10 seconds if this continues."

After a while, Kyle was running out of breath, and stopped his movements. At the same time, the illusion disappears.

The battle Kyle had with the real demon king was an intense match. Now, it was no contest. He'd lost count of how many times he'd been "killed" by the illusion.

It's not that the demon king had become stronger; rather, Kyle had become weaker.

(In Kyle's perspective) 3 days, ago he wouldn't be running out of breath after such a short fight, but now, the speed at which he swings his sword had become slower, and his movements were off. His body just wasn't able to keep

up.

It was a complete lack of basic stamina. Technique and experience were unchanged, but his body had lost quite a bit of muscle, and the way he predicts, he'll be very sore tomorrow.

In hindsight, Kyle remembered that he used to spend these lethargic days doing nothing. He neither studied magic nor moved his body much. He regretted that he wasted such valuable time.

“Let's try ***strength haste!***”

Kyle casted spells that increase his muscle strength and his agility.

These were the most basic spells of a magic swordsman for self-reinforcement. Magic power would run through the body and physical strength and speed would increase.

But,

“What's happening? It's more effective than before.”

He felt more magic going through his body than before, and as a result, a slight movement produced a noticeable effect.

The two important rules to keep in mind when using Ancient Magic are Magic Power and Magic Control.

The more magic power one has, the more times one can cast a spell. More magic power equals more powerful and effective spells.

Magic Control measures the extent to which one understands the principles of magic, and also gauges the imagination powers.

More Magic Control allows a person to cast multiple spells at once, and can abbreviate spells and movements needed to cast spells.

In terms of attacking spells, more magic control allows the user to either broaden or narrow the scope of the attack. It also allows magic power to be used more efficiently, so more spells can be cast.

These principles also apply to the other two types of magic.

After attaining a certain amount of experience, the magician would level up

and would be able to use a higher level of magic.

In short, a lack of magic power limits the spells one can use, and lack of control limits their command.

If one cannot use a spell, nothing happens, but if one cannot command a spell, it either fails or goes berserk. A fire magician who fails to command fire spells would be engulfed in flames, and an ice magician would freeze himself.

Both magic power and magic control can grow through experience, magic power is mostly innate.

The highest level magic Kyle was able to use in the previous world was high-level magic.

“But now, I think I can go for the highest-level magic”

In most of the battles up until now, Kyle only used magic as a support. He would use it to strengthen himself or weaken the enemy. His main weapon was the sword.

Instead of casting some strange attack spell, he would rather strengthen himself and slash his enemies, but with the increased magical powers, he felt like he could make more use of magic.

“I don’t know why this is happening...but I think I have a larger arsenal now.”

For once, he was being optimistic.

“Five...even this doesn’t work...”

He moved around lightly to test the effects, but his body couldn’t keep up with the increased strength. He seemed to have hurt his muscles so he lied on the ground and spread his arms and legs. He groaned.

“I have more magic power, but my body can’t handle it. Even if it’s little by little, I have to get my body accustomed to handling more power.”

Loss of muscle was a major blow, as he was unable to swing the sword as he pictured in his head.

Muscle, technique, and magic. Everything was out of balance.

But with more magic power, there was more room for improvement.

If he trained hard enough, he would be much stronger than he ever was (which was three days ago).

“Stronger than that time, eh...”

The year following the great invasion was a year of desperation for Kyle.

He had to fight. To stay alive, he had to win. He did anything he could possibly do to stay alive and win the battles. And before he knew it, he had become the strongest magic swordsman.

All of this did come with a price. He had to resort to forbidden strength enhancing spells, secret medicine, and as a result of the repeated use of such methods, his body was tattered. Regardless of how much he rests, he most likely would have died within ten years.

“I’m going to get strong while staying healthy...and have an awesome life after retirement!”

Kyle decided his last goal in life.

“I don’t know if that’s a modest goal or an unreasonable one,” said someone from nearby. Kyle was startled and jumped up.

A healthy, tan, and large woman who was about 30 years old had suddenly approached Kyle. She was suited up in a battered armor and was armed with a two-handed sword.

Her face was well refined, but beautiful at the same time.

She's in the same generation as Kyle's mother Seraiya, but in a different sense, she was very young.

"Shi...Shishō!? Since when were you..."

Shishō (師匠) is a Japanese title used to refer to or address teachers or masters of traditional Japanese arts including, but not limited to, martial arts. The word is combination of the kanji *shi* (師), meaning "teacher", and *shō* (匠), meaning "craftsman".

Her name was Leila. She was Kyle's sword mentor and former gladiator herself. She was also Seran's foster mother.

Gladiators are those who fight against other humans or demons or anything that can cause harm to humans. They are the ones who fight in arenas for glory.

It's a dangerous profession, but comes with tons of fame and glory.

While other gladiators either quit because of an injury or were killed, Leila has been undefeated for five years in the continent's largest Arena located in Ruos, the capital of the Garugan Empire.

After retiring 10 years ago, she had complicated relationships and decided to come to Rimaze and depended on Seraiya, and old friend.

Kyle was told that she adopted her benefactor's orphan, who turned out to be Seran.

She has a habit of wandering around, and anyone you knew it, she'd be gone. Her clothes were dirty, so you could tell she just came back from a 'wandering journey.'

"S...since when were you watching?"

"You were killed at least six times. I counted. What kind of crazy demon have you been battling? If this was a real battle, you'd be dead in 5 seconds."

"...I tried to last at least 10 seconds."

Seraiya had been watching Kyle fight in the dim light.

"It's good practice to challenge a foe that is stronger than you, but when the difference in ability is too great...its no use....but anyways, where did you meet

this opponent? You seem to have put together quite a realistic illusion.”

“...It’s just my imagination. I just tried to think of the strongest enemy I could come up with. By the way, I wanted to ask, if you were to fight this enemy, how would you defeat it?”

“You mean me? Well...I’ll take a risk and step forward, maybe lose an arm or a leg, and get up in between the spaces. Then I’ll give one big blow. If that doesn’t kill him, then I’d lose.”

“I see...That’s what I thought you’d do.”

In fact, it was the exact method in which Kyle defeated the demon king. After realizing that his methods mimicked that of his mentor, he let out a small laugh. “Anyways, I’m proud of you. You’re practicing even when I’m not around. I had a feeling you’re the only one that had something special and was worth teaching.”

Leila was one of the top swordsmen in the world, and in her eyes, Kyle was one of the few “chosen” ones who had an extraordinary ability.

In fact, since being mentored by Leila, Kyle’s skills grew even further.

But Kyle at that time was not that motivated, so he was sometimes criticized for it.

“You still teach Seran though.”

“That’s because he’s technically my son. I have no choice, so I teach him even if I know it’s of no use. If it weren’t for that, I wouldn’t teach that stupid kid anything.”

Leila often said: Kyle’s a failing student, and Seran was the worst student.

“Either way, I’m impressed at how much you’ve grown, Kyle.”

The physical attributes haven’t changed much since Leila left for her “trip,” but his techniques were as if he had been building up on one experience after another.

The most noticeable change was his mental preparation.

He used to be like some dog who just sunbathed in the fields, but now, he’s a

lion ready to fight.

“Even your magic has become better, and most of all...you’re more organized...what happened to you?”

Kyle decided that it was not a wise idea to try and fool an intelligent warrior like her.

So he decided to hide some of the truth: “I just had a slight change of feeling. I decided that I’m going to seriously train my sword and magic skills.”

No matter what happens, the stronger he gets, the more things he can do.

“...You....You changed so much, you’re making me sick.”

She really did look sick.

“With all due respect, it’d be great if you can honestly accept and appreciate your student’s growth.”

“People often say to shed a layer of skin. But you seem like you’ve shed four or five layers...Anyways, are you sure it’s just a change of heart? I sense there’s something more to it than just a little change in feeling.”

“There’s nothing....I just really want to be strong,” said a determined Kyle, gripping his sword tight.

“...Did you eat any spoiled food? Are you sure you’re okay?”

“It kinda hurts that you’re actually worried about that...”

“I wonder what that guy is up to.”

“I know. It’s so unusual of him.”

A little into the distance, Seran and Lize were in the bushes watching the two.

Lize was curious about Kyle when he left the house and followed him, and picked up Seran who was also just wandering around. She decided not to talk to Kyle, who was swinging his sword around and decided to just peek.

“Even my mom knows that something’s up with Kyle. I still don’t know how he got so much more skillful all of a sudden.”

It’s been a while since Seran actually watched Kyle practice his sword techniques, but he couldn’t believe that Kyle had gotten that much more

skilled.

“Is it possible to become like that in such a short period of time?...But if there’s one thing I’m sure of, it’s that Kyle isn’t possessed or anything. This is the real Kyle.”

He’s sure of this because he’s known Kyle for such a long time, but at the same time, he sensed that something was off.

“Yeah, in principle, nothing much has changed. It’s as if I haven’t met him in several years.”

She initially thought it was because she hit him hard, but after observing him for a few days, she realized that that wasn’t the case.

“I can’t believe it’s the same guy who I took a piss with on an ant hill three days ago and said it was ‘flooding’.”

Leila walked over after finishing with Kyle: “You two are always doing stupid things.”

“Oh hey mom, I knew you’d see us here.”

“Welcome back Leila-san.”

“I’m back, Lize-chan. You’re probably the only one who greets me anymore.”

“I see you’ve returned from being almost dead. Again.”

“And I see you still haven’t gotten yourself killed, stupid son. You better not have caused trouble to Lize-chan.”

“He came over every day.”

Lize honestly reported to her.

“We’ll talk about this later....but whatever the hell happened to Kyle? He’s acting strange.”

Leila asked if the two were watching because they knew something was up as well, and the two simply nodded in agreement.

“Y...You’re right. Kyle always had the look of a dead fish, but suddenly, he has goals in mind! As if he was motivated to do something! It makes me sick!”

“I can’t believe it’s the same guy who said his dream was to screw around and live off whatever he inherits!”

“I know how you’ve been perceiving Kyle....but that means...neither of you know why he’s suddenly changed..”

Leila was hoping that the two would know the reason behind his sudden change.

“Since the morning on the day before yesterday, he suddenly started acting strange. I don’t know what happened, but whenever I ask about it, he changes the subject. I can’t believe he won’t even tell his best friend.”

“Well~ if there’s one reason a loser like that would suddenly change...”

Leila crossed her arms and thought about it, and suddenly clapped her hands.

“He got a girlfriend!”

“WHAT?!”

“!?”

Seran screamed and Lize froze over.

“Put more accurately, he now understands women. He must have matured, that bastard.”

To Leila, Kyle was like another son. She smirks.

But that wasn’t the case for the two youngsters next to her.

“Damn it! He’s leaving me out of all the fun! I’m never going to forgive him!”

Seran’s fists were clenched. He was burning with rage.

“Did he not say best friend just a while ago?”

“There are exceptions for everything! Nothing more evil than I know of.”

Though Leila thought that jealousy among boys was stupid, she asked a question that everyone had in mind.

“But if that’s the case, who is his partner?”

“You’re right. Who could it be? The most plausible candidate is frozen right in front of me, so it can’t be her. And I’m not trying to show off, but there are no

girls in this town who have feelings towards either of us.”

Seran was looking at Lize the entire time.

“Surely you can’t be serious about showing off.”

“Either way, you’re right. That’s probably the only thing that can cause him to change this much. But damn, who could it be?”

Lize, who was too shocked to do anything, slowly began to move.

Leila stopped Seran, who was about to say something to her.

“If you value your life, it’s probably best to shut up.”

“I can feel the animosity in the air.”

Seran wiped the sweat from his forehead, and watched as Lize approached Kyle.

“Okay. Confess. Who is it?”

“Oooooohhhhhh...w..what are you talking about? What are you suddenly asking me?”

Kyle had his hands on his waist and was greeted by a punch in the stomach by a childhood friend.

“Stop messing with me! Who is it?!”

“Ca..calm down...I kind of understand what you’re getting at, but it’s a misunderstanding! How did you even reach that conclusion!?”

“Leila-san and Seran both confirmed my suspicions!”

“Those two never say anything meaningful. You know that girls our age aren’t interested in neither Seran nor myself.”

Though that was the truth, it pained Kyle to say it aloud.

Before Kyle started slacking off, he was actually quite popular. Not anymore.

“It’s probably true that you can’t win over any girl’s heart in this entire town... but if that’s the case then what is it? A threat? Did you use brainwashing? Put her under a spell? Or drugs?!”

“Are you crazy? I wouldn’t commit such a crime!”

“If it’s nothing crime related then....did you force Aria-chan!?”

That was a girl that was close to Kyle, and Lize treated her like a little sister as well.

“She’s only three! What kind of monster do you think I am?”

“Then...is....is it Leizel-sama?!”

This time it was the opposite. Someone who treated Kyle and his buddies like grandchildren. She was basically the elder member of the town.

“Are you kidding me?! She’s almost 100! Why is your impression of me so crazy!?”

“B...because, there’s no other females in town that like you!”

“You don’t have to be that mean! That’s why at that time I’ll properly....”

It was too late to stop his gaping mouth.

“At that time? Properly?”

“It was a misunderstanding.... Quit it! Stop strangling me! It hurts!”

Of course, Kyle couldn’t tell her that she was the one.

“Have you calmed down?”

“Yeah....”

“Have you thought about what you’ve done?”

“I just lost it for a moment. I’m sorry.”

Lize was on her knees and apologized to Kyle, who was sitting right in front of him.

Lize almost strangled Kyle. It was a while before she calmed down; the sun was about to go down.

“Well. As long as you know that it was a misunderstanding. But why did you lose everything all of a sudden?”

Lize tends to overthink things, and sometimes she goes nuts, but today was especially bad.

A teary eyed Lize responded to Kyle.

“B..beacuse....Kyle...you can’t do anything without me...and all of a sudden..you being with someone is....just mortifying.”

Her voice became smaller and smaller, and the latter half of her response was drowned out.

(Was she this jealous? Maybe I never noticed it)

“It’s okay. I’m not angry anymore. Can you please cheer up.”

Kyle patted her head lightly to comfort her, and she turned red.

“Yeah, come to think of it, you don’t have the balls to do something like that. Had I stayed calm, I would’ve totally realized that. I’m really sorry.”

“You hurt me as you’re apologizing.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Nothing. It’s done...I’m going to train a little more so just go home first. I need to focus.”

“Fine. I’ll make some food and wait for you.”

“Alright. Make sure you tell the two sitting over there.”

Kyle glared at Seran and Leila who were still looking this way.

A short while after Lize went to where the two were, Seran gave a big wave and left.

Kyle was slightly irritated at that, but he took a deep breath, and went back to training.

That night's supper was luxurious, partly because Lize wanted to show her remorse.

"Mhmm, you came home at a great timing."

"Not really."

"Why are you two here?"

Kyle complains to Leila and Seran. He wanted to talk about what happened during the day.

"Why not? That rabbit you see there, that's the one I caught."

"I wanted to eat something tasty since it's been a while. As if I would eat face to face with this loser after my journey."

"Kyle-chan, the food will be tastier if you eat it with more people."

Kyle sighed, but agreed. Over the past year, he hasn't had much opportunity to eat with many people.

After a hearty meal, Kyle became formal and asked everyone a question.

"Mom and Shishō, I wanted to ask you two something."

"whaaaawmmmtmt?"

"Mom, quit talking with your mouth full. I'll ask you later."

Once again, Kyle warned his mother.

"I don't feel fully comfortable, but I don't have anyone else I can ask, so I'll ask you four."

"That's not how you ask for favors, but since the food's bomb, I'll let you go on this one. Ask away."

Seran sounded pretentious.

“Who is someone that can say something and affect multiple countries?”

Today, Kyle was stronger than ever before, but he also realized his limitations.

No matter how strong he becomes, that alone cannot change the fate of the human race.

If he were to change it on his own, he would need the strength to destroy an entire army by himself, but that seemed highly unlikely.

So in figurative terms, he needed the countries to unite and prepare against an invasion, so that they can go on the offensive when duty calls.

This is the most rational way to keep the humans alive, but to achieve this, he needed to group the people together.

“Someone who can move the country eh?”

Leila folded her arms and thought about it.

“If it were simply affecting other countries, then it would probably be the emperor of the kingdom.”

According to Seraiya, that would be the emperor of the Garugan Empire.

“Ah...that...”

The Garugan Empire was a militarist country that was continuing its expansion.

Kyle thought about the young emperor who died to preserve his dignity and pride.

“You sound as if you’ve met him or something.”

“I only know rumors....anyone else come to mind?”

“Well, the highest priest of the Church of the Earth Goddess also has significant influence over many people.”

Leila gave the name of the most respected and most revered being.

“What about Randolph-sama?”

Lize chimed in with the name of a hero who defeated the demon king who

was the ruler during the war 300 years ago.

“Aah..you’re right. Even the elves and dwarves listened to him..”

Seran agreed.

“Hmph...A hero you say.”

In all honesty, the title ‘hero’ itself had the power to attract many people.

On the other hand, with only three years left, there’s no chance that he would be appointed emperor or priest.

There was only one path left.

“Then....there’s no chance but to become a hero.”

He wasn’t a hero because he saved the world; he was becoming a hero to save the world.

The order is reversed, but that can’t be helped.

“I will be a hero. That’s the only option.”

Kyle suddenly stood up—and began to refill his bowl.

Kyle’s back seemed to be emitting a powerful aura, and the four began whispering to each other.

“Hey, like I said, I think something went wrong while I was away.”

In response to Leila, Lize shook her head.

“But nothing comes to mind. We took him to a healer and even cast a healing spell on him, and they said nothing was wrong with him.”

“Well...a few years ago, Kyle-chan and Seran-chan were talking about how they were the ‘chosen ones’ and that they were the special warriors. Maybe it’s a relapse.”

Lize and Leila scoffed at Seraiya’s story.

“Yeah. I remember. We did say that. In fact, we were ostracized by our friends for saying it. What a terrible memory.”

“It was right around that time when your sword skills began improving. You guys claimed that we came up with our own magic spells and moves....After

around 10 beatings from Seraiya and myself, you guys calmed down.”

“Don’t remind me. If this is a relapse...I would like to respect him. He’s probably gonna regret it later anyways.”

Seran defended Kyle in a strange way.

“Definitely. At least he’s still positive about it.”

“If it’s Kyle-chan, he’ll be fine.”

“When Seraiya says something is ‘going to be fine,’ it’s never backed up with any proof...but that can’t be helped. Let’s just watch over and pray for him. “

The four decided to warmly watch over Kyle as he refilled his bowl.

Chapter 3

The day after Kyle swore to become a hero, he sat in his room thinking.

He was thinking about how he was going to be a hero.

“Heeey~ Do you mind?”

While Kyle was deep in his thoughts, Seran came in without knocking.

“Whoa, what’s up with your room?”

Seran was shocked at what he was seeing.

The desk Kyle was facing had books spread everywhere. Everything surrounding his desk was filled with books as well.

All of the books were brought over from Seraiya’s collection. The genre of the books spanned a wide range.

Books dealt with topics ranging from legends, heroes, knowledge on magic, and lifestyles of demons and historic battles.

“I’ve never been thankful of my mother’s collection until today. All the knowledge I need right in front of me. Anyways, what’s up?”

Kyle closed the book he was reading.

“Umm...are you serious about be coming a hero?”

Seran sat on the bed and popped the question.

“Yeah, no doubt. And I need to be one fast.”

He replied without looking at Seran.

“But you can’t be a hero just because you want to be one.”

“That’s why I’m struggling...do you have any idea how I can become a hero?”

He asked Seran.

“Well~ defeat the demon king and you’ll instantly be a hero!”

“...If that was possible, I wouldn’t be thinking this hard.”

Kyle let out a big sigh.

“There’s no method that’s guaranteed to make anyone a hero...but I’ve began to realize what’s needed. Seran, do you know what I’m talking about?”

“Of course....you need strength...right?”

All the past heroes were praised for their extraordinary strength.

“Well...obviously...In my opinion, it’s money, connections, and luck.”

“Seems strange. But it’s somewhat convincing.”

“First, money. This is because heroes shouldn’t expect anything in return. For example, let’s say you’re in a rural village that’s been attacked by demons and you’re coincidentally there. What would you do?”

“Well...if it’s my first time there, I’d look for cute girls.”

“You’re off from the start. You’d need to ward off the attack. When you do, you’d most likely receive compensation. But what if you don’t receive the award? What if you say that helping those in need is your obligation? And just walked off?”

“That would be overwhelming. I’d probably be a legend in that village.”

“A courageous act without demanding anything in return. Doesn’t that sound heroic? This can’t be done without any spare money though.”

“I see what you mean now. If you say so, you can do a lot with money.”

Seran nodded in agreement.

“Next, I need connections. This goes hand in hand with money, but whenever someone tries to do something, connections come in handy. The more respected your connections are, the better it would be.”

“Ah, I see. Being backed by respected people in power would help a lot.”

“In essence, it’s give and take.”

“You’re slowly moving away from your goal of becoming a hero.”

“Anyways, if I’m associating with highly respected people, my reputation will naturally rise as well. If I have money and a good reputation, I can accomplish a

lot. But I still can't become a hero with just those two."

"So the last thing you need is luck?"

"Exactly."

Kyle said this was the hardest part.

"I see....luck...that's something you can't really work for."

"And plain luck won't suffice. The luck a hero needs is different from ordinary luck."

Heroes shine in times of war, sadness, confusion, and grief.

Also, the worse the situation is, the brighter they shine.

"In other words, I need the luck to be there when something terrible happens. Only then can I become a hero."

"Are you saying....."

"Relax, I'm not planning anything bad to benefit myself. I don't even have to do anything bad; the world has a lot of danger already. Something bad is always happening somewhere."

"I know....but to be placed in those situations is completely dependent on... luck...You can't do much about it can you?"

"Well...I have a trick to make it happen, so nothing to worry about."

Kyle flapped the thin notebook that was on his desk.

The things written in this notebook are filled with terrible things that are to happen in the next four years.

Other than large-scale invasions that can't be helped, there are some things that can be prevented with adequate preparation.

There's too many things and too little time to handle all of them, but something that's too easy to handle won't amount to much heroism.

Heroes always act swiftly when something comes up.

It might hurt more people in the process but if it means changing the seemingly hopeless fate of the world, it must be done.

“I will do anything to be a hero. Even if it’s unfair.”

“Doesn’t that defeat the entire purpose of being a hero?”

“Don’t worry. I’m only say this kind of stuff in front of you.”

“I see...I forgot to ask the big question. Why do you want to become a hero?”

“I suppose you’re curious huh?”

Seran initially thought that Kyle was going through puberty and that it was messing with his mentality.

If that was the case, then Seran would have fully supported Kyle. But it was different.

He sensed that Kyle was determined more than ever.

“I can sense that you’re serious about this, but for some reason, I sense that your goal isn’t to become a hero; rather, you’re trying to be a hero to achieve some other objective.”

Kyle wasn’t expecting Seran to see right through his intentions, but it shows that they’ve been close friends for a long time.

There will be a time when Kyle will confess his true intentions. But it’s too early.

“You’re my best friend. You’re absolutely right. I do have a goal in mind. Regardless of whether you’ll believe me or not, I decided that it’s too early to tell anyone. I just hope you trust me on this one.”

“If you say so.”

Seran sat up straight. He knew it was pointless asking any further questions.

“Well, good luck my friend. I’ll always be supporting you.”

Seran waved as he left the room. Kyle just stared back at him with a puzzled look on his face.

“...Why does he sound like he doesn’t care?”

Kyle’s plans involved Seran.

“Whatever. I’ll deal with money by doing this and I want to meet that guy too.

In terms of fame and reputation, I'll just prevent the Arcane incidentbut my schedule is really tight."

Either way, there's not much I can do around here.

Kyle looked out the window. He knew he had to embark on a journey soon.

"So. I'm gonna go on a trip."

"A trip...?"

The next day, Kyle reported his plans to Leila.

"Did you tell Seraiya about this?"

"I did...she cried a little, but she understood."

"She is overprotective....what did you tell Lowell?"

"Lowe....? Oh...my father....wait...when's he coming back? Did he come back? Whatever. I'll just tell him when I see him."

"Show some respect. I do think that going around on a trip is a good idea. With your current strength and power, you'd be able to handle most problems along the way. By the way, take Seran with you."

"That was my original plan. Are you sure that's fine with you?"

"Use him to block arrows or magic. He has other uses. He can be your substitute and you can sacrifice him if you feel like."

"I'm not going to waste him like that. Unless I absolutely have to, I won't sacrifice him."

"You're seriously debating this right in front of me? Give me a break."

Seran complained.

"What about my opinion?"

"You have no say. I've always wanted you and Kyle to explore the world to understand the harsh reality."

Kyle knew that regardless of anybody's intentions, he would be forced on a journey within a year.

There were some problems here and there, but Kyle remembered that it was

a good journey overall.

“You had no future in this town anyways.”

“What are you saying? I have my future planned out you know?”

“Tell me then.”

“Finding two or three beautiful, rich, and sincere maids who’d let me do anything to them. I’d be surrounded by them for the rest of my life.”

Leila pretended not to see her son who was being very serious.

“I’ll be fine if he’s alive. Do as you wish.”

“I suppose I can use him in a lot of ways.”

“To be honest, I was being conservative when I said 2 or 3 maids. I’d like around 10.”

Leila let out a big sigh, knowing she failed in raising Seran. Kyle comforted her saying he was born with the weird personality.

That evening, Kyle was at the hilltop practicing his sword as usual.

Just as he was about to go home after experiencing some muscle pain, Lize stopped by.

“What’s up?”

Kyle saw that Lize was just out of it.

“Seraiya came over to complain to me. She told me that you were dumping her.”

“I’m really sorry about my mom. I really am.”

Kyle bowed deeply.

“So. Is it true that you’re leaving on a journey?”

“Ohh....yeah....I need to prepare first, but I’ll be on my way within two or three days.”

“Where are you going?”

“My first destination is Mallad. The capital. I have to prepare for a lot of

things.”

The capital city of Mallad is about a five day walk away from where they currently live.

“I see...”

Lize’s face turned serious.

“Umm...Can I ask you something?”

“I have no intentions of bringing you along.”

Kyle knew what she was going to ask, so he answered the question before she could ask.

“Why?! Seran’s going with you right?”

“I can’t throw you around and put you in danger.”

“I won’t be obstructive!”

“I know your strengths.”

Her actual power is very strong. Especially these past few days.

Kyle is gifted in the art of swords, and Lize was skilled in martial arts. From when she was little, she trained with the guards of Kairis.

Lize was skilled. Not as much as Kyle, but to make up for it, she worked diligently.

She always said that she would make use of it when she grew up.

Lize’s father died in a war before she was born, so her mother definitely would have wanted Lize to live a more peaceful life.

Lize’s mother died two years ago and since then, she’s been helping out at her aunt’s house. She still continues her training but doesn’t bother anybody other than Kyle or Seran.

When Lize heard that Kyle was going on a trip, she couldn’t stand it.

Given her strength, Lize would probably a great addition to Kyle’s team.
“If it’s about your mother, I’ll apologize.”

“It’s not just that. It’s also me being selfish. I just want you to be in safe. I

never want you to be in danger...”

Kyle thought about the moment Lize died in his arms.

He never wanted to go through that experience ever again.

“Listen to me. I also need a home. Knowing I have a home to return to empowers me.”

Kyle grabbed both of Lize’s shoulders and looked at her straight in the eye.

“I’ll report my return to you before anybody else. And I want you to welcome me home before anybody. So...I need you to stay home and wait for me.”

“Kyle...I....”

Kyle leaned in and gently touched her lips with his.

“ah....”

Lize’s face turned bright red.

“I knew you’ve changed. You weren’t using these tactics before. Now....I have...no choice...but to listen...”

“I’m older.”

“We’re the same age.”

“...I meant mentally.”

Kyle looked at Lize in a friendly way and squeezed her. Lize didn’t resist.

“Promise me you’ll come back. It’s hard enough knowing you’re gone.”

“Relax. I’m not going to be gone forever. And I won’t do anything crazy.”

This was a lie. Kyle knew he would do anything to achieve his goals.

“Ok...”

Kyle felt a little guilty, but he hugged Lize anyways.

“Let’s go home.”

Lize seemed reluctant at first, but she grabbed Kyle’s hand.

In order to get home, they had to walk through several busy streets. They

were sure that they would run into their friends. But it didn't really matter now.

"Yeah. Let's go."

With a big grin on her face, Lize squeezed Kyle's hand.

(The first time I kissed someone was when I was 18...I was quite shy...) Kyle started walking with silly thoughts spinning through his head.

The sun was setting when the two were walking down the main street of Rimaze.

It was rush hour, and the flow of workers going home made the street very busy.

The stores along the road were trying to grab their last customers before closing.

Lize found an area that looked a little different from everything else in the street.

Some journeyman was gathering a lot of attention.

She had on a sturdy cloak, and a dagger in her waist. The lady had all her belongings organized neatly, just like a typical journeyman.

Nobody seemed to care.

"Ah! An elf...."

The elf was walking towards Kyle and Lize.

The elf belonged to a rather isolated species; they hardly ever leave the forest on their own.

There were no nearby elf villages, so it was quite rare for an elf to be strolling the streets here.

Beautiful figures and long ears were the defining characteristics of elves. This elf, however, had a different kind of elegance that was special.

She looked straight forward. Her eyes were filled with determination.

She left such a strong impression on people passing by, that everyone turned to look once more.

“I knew elves were beautiful. If Seran were here, his eyes would be glued to her.”

Lize said that if that happened, she’d have to smack him.

But Kyle wasn’t paying attention at all.

Kyle let go of her hand, and started walking as if he was being pulled towards the elf.

“K...Kyle....?”

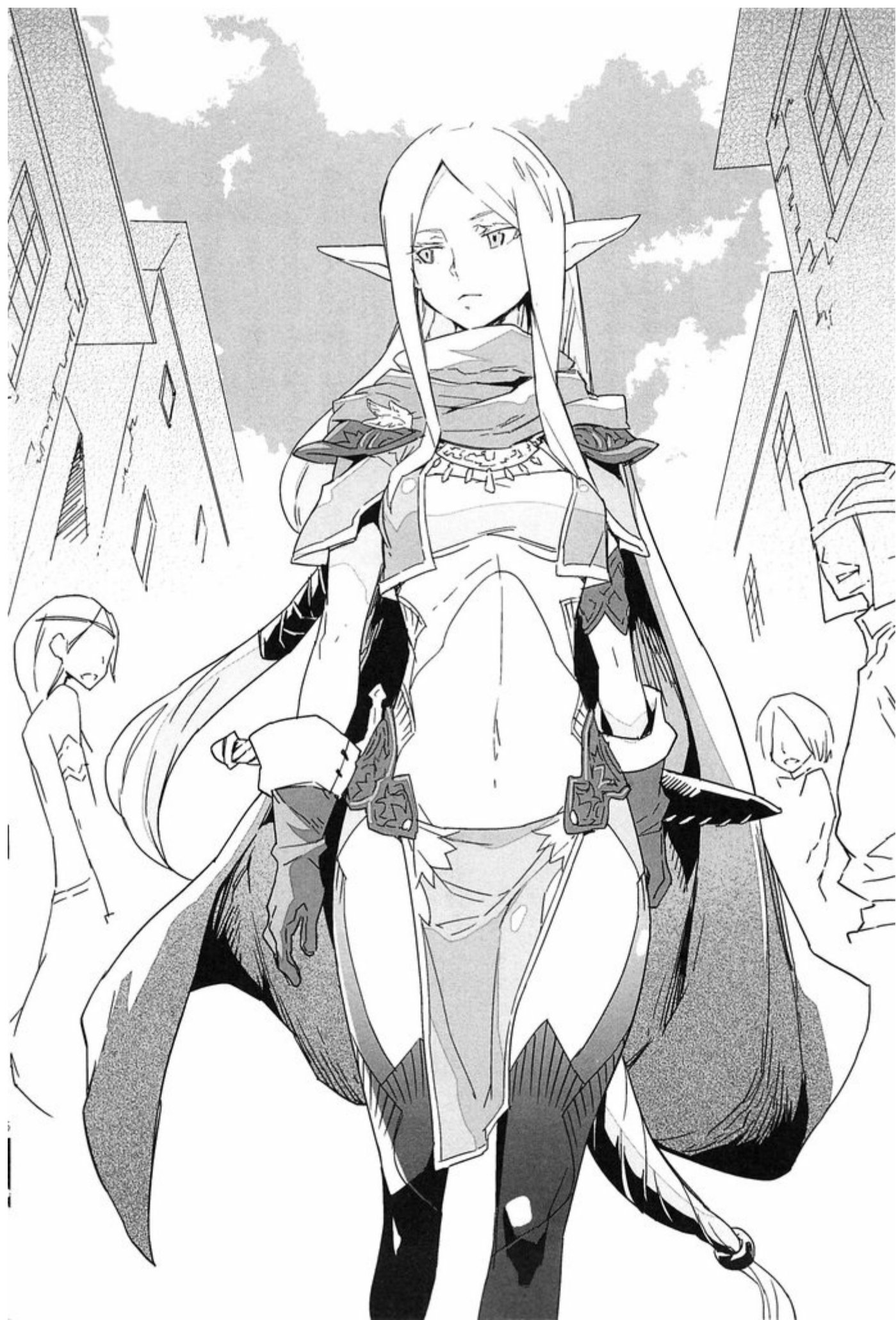
Lize seemed anxious.

Kyle didn’t answer.

He just kept staring at the elf in front of him.

And then he whispered.

“Exes...”



Ulza was known for being strange. Everyone began to believe that label.

Most elves live their entire lives without ever leaving the forest. Ulza left to see what the outside looked like.

She ran into countless issues on her journey, but her spiritual magic and her sword skills allowed her to continue with little hassle.

She didn't have any special reason to visit Rimaze; it was just the next stop on her journey.

And when she walked through the streets, a man looked at her in a strange way.

It was as if he had seen a ghost.

She was used to getting strange looks on the street, but this was entirely different.

Agony, happiness, confusion...

It didn't look like the man viewed her with hostility, but the look she received was unusual.

She was sure it was the first time she'd seen this gentleman, but his appearance urged her to talk to him. But at that exact moment, the human mumbled something...

"Exes...."

It was a very faint voice, but elves have superior hearing. There was no way she missed it.

"How do you know!!"

Ulza screamed, and Kyle was stunned.

"Huh??...Oh...damn! I shouldn't have said that in front of her. I'm sorry Ulza....Wait...no....I mean....N..nice to meet you? Welcome to Rimaze?"

"You think you can trick me!?"

Kyle smiled and pretended to be a regular villager in the town of Rimaze, but Ulza was insulted. Needless to say, she was very agitated.

"She did say she had visited Rimaze before...But I didn't think she'd visit at

this time....Damnit..."

Kyle was holding his head. He regretted the fact that he let his tongue slip.

Ulza stayed with Kyle until the final battle. She was very supportive in terms of fighting and mental support.

Kyle didn't forget her. But at the same time, he really didn't mind her too much.

He did, however, remember that right around this time, she was out on a journey to widen her perspectives. Her home is far away, so he thought the chances of meeting her here were slim.

Kyle had decided that when he had time, he would go visit her, but he wasn't expecting to meet her like this.

Ulza was agitated further with Kyle's nonsense mumbling, and being the impatient one, she reached for her dagger on her waist.

"S...Stop!"

Kyle used a spell, ***haste***, which could be cast without saying anything.

Using this, he was able to close the distance with her in an instant.

To prevent her from brandishing her dagger, she grabbed her by the waist, and to prevent her from thrashing, he embraced her entire body.

To any bystander, it looked like he was giving her a huge hug.

To render her powerless, the best thing to do was to just pummel her, but there was no way he was going to do that to her.

"L...Let go!!"

Ulza tried to break free, but elves were small and delicate. She was unable to free herself.

"Calm down. There's soldiers nearby. You'll be arrested!"

If a foreign elf were to brandish a weapon and attack a human, she would most likely be severely punished.

"Shut up! Let me go!!"

She showed no signs of calming down.

If this continued any longer, she would do anything to grab the dagger and slash Kyle.

If she used any spiritual magic, things would be worse.

Kyle had no other options but to use magic to calm her down.

But elves have a high resistance to magic, so spells aren't that effective.

Kyle had a trick.

" Sleep Exes! "

By using her mana* in a sleep inducing spell, he made it work.

"Y...yo....you...."

You could tell she was still angry by looking at her eyes, but she fell asleep just like that.

Kyle grabbed Ulza just as she was about to collapse to the ground.

To him, this was no different from what happened just five days ago.

He remembered the night before the battle.

"...We meet again...."

He gently caressed her sleeping face.

Ulza was gently breathing while she slept, and Kyle smiled.

At that moment, Kyle felt an excruciating pain on his side, and he went flying.

His was lying on the floor and his body was bent. After a few moments, he was finally able to look up.

"What are you doing....."

"You really like hitting me in the guts don't you!!"

Lize was looking down at Kyle. Her face showed no expression whatsoever.

"It's not what it seems like. Just listen to me. Calm down. Let's talk about this. She also lost her home and her family...so we comforted each other...and I was lonely because you were gone...or..."

“What are you talking about?!”

“It’s a misunderstanding! Or maybe not...but it’s complicated!”

“Be serious! You’re acting just like Seran. I can’t believe you just attacked a girl on the street because she was pretty.”

“No, it’s not like that! That’s a complete misunderstanding!”

“I knew I couldn’t trust you! I’m coming with you! I don’t care what you say, I’m going with you on your trip! No way I’m letting you out of my sights!”

The ensuing argument that continued right next to Ulza’s sleeping body carried on until it was stopped by nearby soldiers.

However, since Lize beating up Kyle was such a common event, she got away with it with only a warning.

Lize was preparing tea at Kyle’s house in his reception room.

The three sat down.

Ulza was very cautious of the two. She didn’t even drink the tea, but she seemed calmer than before.

It’s not like she could do anything about it: when she woke up, Lize was being lectured by soldiers, and Kyle was beat up pretty badly. It took a while for her to understand what was going on. For that reason, her rage simmered down.

Lize and Kyle continued with the argument.

“...I’m telling you...it’s a misunderstanding...!”

“.....can I talk now?”

Ulza finally interrupted with a gentle but powerful voice.

“So...um....nice to meet you...I’m Kyle...Your name is Ulza...right?”

“You really think you can still fool me? Spill it out. Why do you know my *mana*?”

She had calmed down a bit, but one wrong move and she’d probably slice Kyle’s head off.

Kyle knew this, and anyone who understood the situation would understand

as well.

Mana refers to a name other than the one used on a daily basis. It has a magical meaning in it.

Spiritual magicians use their mana to make a contract with the spirits, and cast their spells by borrowing their power.

The *mana* is usually known only by close friends, the naming parent, and a significant other. Misuse or abuse of the *mana* could be fatal.

The reason is because the *mana* is linked directly to soul. If a spell that affects the mental state is casted using the *mana*, she would be unable to fight back.

If the 'charm' spell is casted, she would definitely be a slave. On the other hand, if a curse was inflicted using the *mana*, she wouldn't be able to resist.

In essence, Ulza's life was in Kyle's hands.

"Nobody knows my *mana* except my parents. How do you know it!"

In his head, Kyle said: "You're the one who told me..."

In the *other world*, both Kyle and Ulza had lost important people. They trusted each other more and more and eventually, they covered each other's backs.

The night before they stormed the Demon King's castle, Ulza came into Kyle's room.

// "My *mana* is *Exes*...When we're alone, call me by that name...and as long as you're with me..." //

Ulza was holding onto Kyle tightly when she told him this.

(Damn, Ulza was cute then...)

Kyle remembered her tear-filled eyes when she said this.

"Why are you grinning....."

Kyle snapped back, and saw that Lize was staring back at him.

He cleared his throat and straightened his posture before looking straight at Ulza.

"I'm sorry. I just can't tell you right now. But I'm the only one that knows right

now. There is nobody else that knows this right now. So you don't have to worry about that anymore."

What he said was meant for Lize as well; not just Ulza.

Lize was about to say something, but when she saw Kyle's face, she decided it was best to not say anything, so she just sighed.

"Are you daft?! You think I'm going to believe you?!"

Ulza was clearly not satisfied with Kyle's response.

"It's easy to lie about this...I could make anything sound true...but that would be pointless."

(Actually, it was my fault anyways for letting my tongue slip...I can't think of a good excuse...")

But he wondered what would happen if he did tell the truth.

"Four years later, we'll fall in love. That was when you told me your mana. As evidence, I know you have a heart shaped birthmark on your ass. I'm pretty sure I'm the only guy that knows this...Also, your left ear is very sensitive...and a whole bunch of other stuff..."

The day Kyle tells her this, would be his last day. Ulza would definitely slice him into pieces and tear him apart with magic.

Instead, he said, "I don't like to lie...that's why I just said I can't tell you right now. I know you probably feel insecure about this, and I apologize."

Lize looked at Kyle with the what-are-you-talking-about face, but he ignored it.

Kyle used what he knew from before to his advantage.

He knew that her weakness was being dealt with face-to-face. He also knew that she hated liars.

"And even if I did tell the truth...would you believe me...even if you used the lie detection magic...could you prove it...?"

The lie detection magic was just what it sounds like. It tells the user if the other person is lying or not. But its effectiveness is questionable. Sometimes it

gives false positives.

Kyle's tactic paid off.

Ulza seemed to relax a bit.

"But...I still don't feel safe...Normally, I'd have to kill you to prevent you from telling anyone my *mana*..."

"Hey!!"

The word 'kill' set Lize off. She interrupted the two.

"I know the how important your *mana* is to you. But I can't afford to be killed right now. So in exchange, how about you use the spell: Contract Agreement?"

"Contract Agreement?! Are you serious?"

Ulza's eyes widened.

Contracts are basically deals that spiritual magicians have with the spirits using their *mana*. The Contract Agreement, on the other hand, is an agreement with humans that places a restriction of some kind.

Since the use of this magic would result in the human knowing the mana of the one dealing the spell, it's rarely used. But since Kyle already knows Ulza's *mana*, that didn't matter.

".....I can't believe you know about the Contract Agreement....only elves and spiritual magicians should know that..."

"Here's the deal: I won't tell anyone your *mana*. Nor will I abuse it. What do you say?"

"You do know what will happen to you if you break this contract right?"

"Of course. I die."

Contracts borrow the power of spirits, so going against them results in the punishment of death. Kyle's life was on the line, but he brought out this agreement as if it were no big deal.

"Are you sure you understand? As long as I'm the one using the Contract Agreement, I can trick you and stuff too you know? If I wanted...I could take

your life....”

“I’m not worried about that. I know Ulza wouldn’t do such a thing.”

“We just met. What makes you so confident that I won’t?”

“And even if it were true, you wouldn’t warn me beforehand.”

“...hmph.....”

Ulza looked away. She clearly was not having any fun.

“Fine. My life is on the line as well. I see no reason to object.”

“Ah, okay. Regarding why I know your real name, I’ll speak when the time comes. I promise.”

“But not right now. I can’t create a Contract Agreement until the next full moon.”

Contracts require the power of Muna, the Guardian Elf and Moon God. His power is largely dependent on the phases of the moon.

“If I remember correctly, there’s at least half a month until the next full moon.”

Ulza let out a sigh, knowing that she’d have to stay in town until then next full moon.

Kyle, without any remorse, added on: “Oh. Sorry. By the way, I’m leaving town in a day or two.”

“W....What?”

*Translator’s note: mana written in characters in the original is 真名. Literally, it means true name. First character translates to True/Real/Authentic (read ma). Second character translates to Name (read na). The na is the same character for the first letter of the Japanese word for name namae(名前). The mana used here should not be confused for the mana that most of you associate with magic spells (i.e. HP and Mana).

Chapter 4

2 days later.

In front of Kyle's house.

"Well then, farewell Kyle-chan. Don't only eat fish and meat, okay? Make sure to eat vegetables, too."

"Yeah yeah, I got it."

Kyle, who had just finished packing, now had to deal with a sobbing Seraiya.

"Don't worry, I will be with him."

Lize, who had also finished packing, comforted Seraiya.

"Yes yes. Lize-chan. Take care of Kyle-chan, please."

Seraiya was wiping away her tears with a handkerchief.

Kyle was tired of her crying over and over, so he was getting ready to leave.

"I'm going."

"Try to visit, okay? Good luck."

Seraiya blew her nose while waving goodbye.

"Do your best Kyle. And take care of your friends."

"Yeah, I know. Wait. Huh? You were here dad?"

Lowell, Kyle's father, was standing next to Seraiya.

"I came back the day before yesterday. I was at home all day yesterday, too..."

"I...I didn't notice..."

Kyle remembered that there was food prepared even when Lize wasn't home the other day.

"Honey, don't you think it's too early for him to go out on a journey?"

"I know you're worried. But he's our kid."

"Well.... I suppose... He is our child. What will we do if we don't trust him,

right? I'm sorry."

"It's okay, Seraiya."

"I'm going. Rest well, you two."

Kyle's parents were slowly getting carried away into their own world. The last thing Kyle wanted to see was a love scene between his parents.

"We're leaving~"

Lize stood beside Kyle. She waved to everybody.

"Did you tell your family?"

"Yeah, I told my aunt's family and visited my parents' graves."

"Did you pack everything?"

"I'm all set. It's much easier than when I stayed in the mountains for a month."

"I remember... I still think you should stay home, you know..."

"Too late. You can't stop me now."

Lize had a huge smile on her face and Kyle knew that it was useless to try to make her stay, so he just let out a big sigh and gave up.

Seran and Ulza were already waiting at the meeting place.

"I can't believe a beautiful lady like you is going to be joining our team!!"

"I'm just watching! I have no recollection of being in your team! I still don't understand why I'm going with you guys...."

Ulza was clearly depressed about this, but Seran was extremely happy.

"Going on a trip with Kyle alone is depressing...and Lize doesn't make me feel any better, either..."

"You don't listen to people, do you..."

Ulza massaged her temples as if she was having a migraine.

"Ulza-san, it's best if you just ignore him."

"Yeah, it's better if you just pretend he's not there."

Lize and Kyle were used to handling him.

“What did Master say?”

Kyle asked Seran.

“What? Oh. The usual. In fact, she was like, “What are you still doing here? Hurry up and go!””

Kyle let out a dry laugh. It’s what he expected Master to say.

“Let’s go.”

Kyle called out to everyone.

Seran and Lize looked eager to go, but Ulza seemed like she wanted to relax for a few more days here.

“Wait. The East Gate is this way.”

Lize called out to Kyle, who had started to walk.

They had originally planned to go to Mallad first, which was east of Rimaze, but Kyle was heading to the North Gate.

“No, we’re going this way. I’m changing the first destination. I had planned to go to the capital first to buy some things, but there’s no need for that anymore..”

“What were you going to buy?”

“A magic tool. Slightly expensive... that costs at least 30,000 Gadoru...”

Gadoru is the unit of currency here. 1 Gadoru can buy you a meal at a street shop. A regular person would be able to make a living with around 10,000 Gadoru per year.

The total amount that the four had right now didn’t even reach 10,000 Gadoru.

“30,000 you say? That’s quite a lot. How were you going to earn that much money?”

Seran had every right to be worried. There was no way to earn 30,000 through regular means.

“I wasn’t going to do anything dangerous. I was just going to be a swordsman and bet on myself to increase my earnings.”

“Wow...”

“Anyways...There’s no need for me to buy the magic item since the highly skilled spiritual magician Ulza has joined our team.”

As Kyle introduced Ulza, Lize and Seran started applauding.

They acted as if they were all childhood friends.

“Like I said...I don’t remember ever joining your team....”

Ulza seemed unimpressed, but that didn’t bother Kyle at all.

“The first goal is to reach the Sanguld Mountains.”

The Sanguld Mountains were on the northern side of the border. It was a dangerous mountain range and took around half a month to reach.

“That’s quite far isn’t it?”

“It’s okay. Ulza can use the spell ‘Wind Walker’.”

Wind Walker adds the power and blessing of the Wind Spirit Silfeed. It makes walking several times faster. In addition, it comes at little cost to the one casting the spell, so it’s very useful.

What would take half a month now only took 3 days.

This magic was very useful, but there was no method for humans to cast it. It was so useful that people would hire spiritual magicians at astronomical prices just for this particular spell.

“Wow~ Spiritual magicians have so many useful spells. It helps a lot.”

“Like I said.....”

Kyle was talking as if he and Ulza were best friends. Ulza, on the other hand, seemed tired.

(I knew she’s weak to a change in atmosphere. Once things don’t go her way, it’s all downhill from there.)

It’s amazing how he managed to drag along a stubborn Ulza.

“What do you plan on doing once we get to the Sanguld Mountains?”

Lize asked Kyle.

Do you know the famous legends of that mountain?

“Umm....I do remember...that there’s a hidden labyrinth somewhere in there....”

Lize remembered someone telling her this legend.

“You’re right. The largest human labyrinth known as the Magic King.”

There were many other legends that dealt with the ancient magic kingdom of Zares.

The Heart of Shinryu that Kyle had was one of them, but the Magic King was another one. The greatest known magician in human history, Sildonia Zares, left a huge labyrinth. According to the legend, there were lots of treasures inside.

“That's a legend right? Does it really exist?”

“Are you serious? Do you know how many years that’ll take?”

“Relax. I have a map with the details of exactly where everything is.”

Kyle pulled out an old map and flashed it to everyone.

“Huh...is this real?”

“I found it in my mom’s old collection. The book itself is from the age of Zares so I’m sure it’s real.”

Kyle was also sure about this, because he had been there before. But he didn’t tell them about that part.

During the Great Invasion, the outlook for the humans was so bad that they began to depend on legends as well. Just then, it was said that the imperial family had a sealed map of the labyrinth.

Kyle vaguely remembered this story and went back to his ruined village and dug out the map from the book in his mother’s collection.

With this map, the humans were able to increase their forces and connect it to the final battle. He thought it was fate that his mother guided him to the

map.

Kyle looked back to the direction of his home.

He knew that by now, his parents were in their own world, so he let out a dry laugh.

“It doesn’t seem fake. The paper the map is printed on is from a magic tree that’s been around for over a thousand years. Most of the trees were destroyed in a battle a long time ago, so this kind of paper isn’t made anymore.”

Ulza started to show some interest; she knew that they stopped making this paper after Zares was destroyed.

“However, even if we have a map, the insides are extremely spacious. It’s also dangerous. There are many traps and self-activating magic weapons....We’ll probably be killed ten times over.”

“Then there’s no use going.”

Seran felt it was suicidal.

“I know there’s no use. But, there’s supposed to be a ton of treasure and magic items there. Whatever we do, it’s easier if we have money.”

“Treasures...that is tempting...But I still value my life, you know.”

Seran was starting to think about it when Kyle reassured him: “There’s no need to go head first.”

“So....?”

“We’re going to dig ourselves in.”

“You never know what can happen in life. Half a month ago, I never expected to be here digging my way into a legendary labyrinth.”

Seran wore a headband with a luminescent rock placed into it as he was digging.

“After I swore to be a hero, I never thought my first task was to dig a tunnel.”

Kyle also had a band with luminescent rock strapped to his head.

The two used shovels to dig through the rocks and placed them in a wagon. Occasionally, they wiped their sweat away with the towels they had around their necks.

“You fools. You two of all people should not be complaining.”

Behind the two boys stood Ulza, also with a band strapped to her head. She was giving orders from the back as she checked the map. She was also using the help of the Earth Spirit Nome.

“I can’t believe I’m helping you guys... Hey! Seran! Don’t dig there! We haven’t hardened the surroundings! Kyle! Use **Detect Magic** once you finish hauling the dirt outside! Things might be misaligned!”

Detect Magic was a spell that detects magic power. The three used that magic to detect the power coming from the treasure inside, and adjusted their movements accordingly.

“I feel like Ulza is putting in the most work here...”

Kyle simply nodded to Seran.

“She’s a very serious person. She hates people who slack off.”

“Quit talking! Keep working!!”

“ Yes ma’am!! ”

The two decided it was better to not talk back.

The Sanguld mountains spanned an area as large as a small country. Kyle and his friends were deep in the mountains where nobody dared to travel. The mountains were like a staircase. The plateaus in between each step had goats grazing on the grass. The steep areas, however, were very dangerous.

Kyle was at the rear entrance. The real entrance of the labyrinth was on the other side of this mountain.

This area was also the closest to the treasures, and the perfect place to start digging.

Although if they decided to actually dig through the stone, it would take years.

This is where Ulza comes in handy.

Using the Earth Spirit Nome allowed her to make the stone into a softer dirt-like substance so it's easier to dig.

At the same time, to prevent any avalanches, she hardened the surrounding stone and made it sturdy. Finally, by using the Wind Spirit Silfeed, they were all able to breathe without a problem even if they were deep in the mountains.

As a result, they were extremely efficient.

Kyle's original plan was to fight at the arena to collect funds so he could buy magic tools that did what Ulsa was currently doing. Thanks to Ulza, there was no need for that anymore.

Kyle could have asked others for help or hired others, but he wanted to do it with as few people as he could. In fact, he originally planned to do it with Seran alone, but that would take much longer.

"Good work all three of you."

Lize greeted the three as they walked out of the tunnel. She was in the middle of cooking something.

The base camp was right near the entrance of the tunnel and there were two tents.

Kyle, Seran, and Ulza were in charge of digging, while Lize handled the cooking and other miscellaneous jobs.

It's been five days. They were getting used to this lifestyle.

"The laundry is all dry, and I'm sure you don't want to eat in those clothes, so

why don't you all go change? The food will be ready in a bit. Oh, and I'll wash the clothes you're wearing now so just put them all together, okay?"

Lize was giving out orders and the three went into the tents to change.

"I'm so tired~ I can't move~"

Seran was done changing.

"Keep it up, we're almost there."

"You too. Your legs are shaking."

As Seran pointed out, Kyle's legs were shaking. But he pretended that he was fine.

"My body is fine, but calling the spiritual apostles has drained me mentally."

Ulza sat down and let out a sigh.

Using apostles differed from using contracts to summon the powers of the spirits. With the apostles, Ulza was able to give direct orders. For example, she could command the Fire Spirit Salamander to "light 100 candles individually."

There are certain things each spirit can and cannot do, and depending on the level of the person using the spirits, the commands can be quite detailed. This is one of the reasons why spiritual magicians are still considered useful compared to the ancient magicians.

"It's ready~"

Lize set out all the food in front of the three.

"I must say. Lize, your cooking skills are amazing. I've been on long journeys, but all the food outside the city tastes bland..."

Ulza seemed surprised.

There was a stew, grilled chicken, and fruit. All of it tasted quite delicious. The meals brought excitement every day for the three working in the mountains. Ulza knew how to cook, but not in the wild like this. During her journey, Ulza normally ate preserved food.

"There happened to be a really fat bird so I used that."

“Hmm...huh? This meat over here is different?”

“Oh that one is bear. I killed it just a while ago so that’s fresh as well.”

“When did you....”

Ulza was enjoying the meal, but the two boys just stuffed food into their mouths. The combination of exhaustion and hunger left them with no energy to talk.

Lize refilled their bowls as if it was a routine.

“How much longer do you guys have to dig?”

“Well, at this pace, we’ll be done by tomorrow or the day after.”

Kyle answered while drinking his after-meal tea.

The Detect Magic spell was returning very faint signals at first, but as they dug further, the signal strength increased.

“I see. Go take a bath once you’re done, and get ready for tomorrow~”

The bath was a little far away, and it was big enough so that several people could go in at once. It was a hot spring, but it wasn’t natural.

Ulza used the Earth Spirit Nome to create a crater and the Water Spirit Undeene to summon the spring water from below while Kyle used his fire magic to heat it up.

“I never expected to be able to take a bath everyday in the mountains like this. When I went to the mountains before, all I did was wipe my body.”

Lize stretched her body and relaxed.

Lize’s body showed the effects of her training. There was not a single bit of fat and her body was in a nice streamlined shape.

Her legs had just a bit of muscle, but it wasn’t too obvious. Her skin had a healthy tan and looked beautiful.

When she flipped over, her large ass floated on the water.

“I’ve also been on a long journey. This was a long overdue bath.”

The elves were a delicate species, but Uzla was an exception.

She had a very balanced body. Her breasts weren't huge, but they had a beautiful shape.

If she was a statue, she'd probably be placed in some king's room.

She rested on the edge of the bath, and tied her blonde hair. Her skin was white and glowing.

"I envy you."

Lize had an average sized chest, but Ulza had a rather large one.

"Really? Where I grew up, those kind of hips are envied."

"R...really?"

Thought Lize had an average chest, her hips were larger than most girls her age.

"Yeah, you look like you could rear a lot of healthy kids. Look at me...."

Ulza stood up, got close to Lize, and looked at her own skinny hips and small ass.

"...The old women in our town tell me the same thing. But it'd be better if it was more like you Ulza-san...oh...a heart!"

There was a heart shaped area with darker pigmentation on Ulza's white ass.

"D...don't say it. I don't like it."

Ulza hid the scar by going down in the water.
Her face was bright red, but Lize thought it was cute.

They both laughed and Lize thanked Ulza again for the hot bath.

"I didn't know magic could come in handy like this. I can't use magic so I'm really thankful."

"Don't be. Besides, you killed a bear with your bare hands. That's much cooler."

Ulza got a glimpse of the bear carcass before going in the bath. It was as big as two grown men and weighed as much as 7 or 8.

"I'm also in the midst of training, so it's no big deal."

“Training....for Kyle?”

“Eh?...Ah...yeah...I mean, this is the only thing I excel at so...”

Lize rubbed her cheeks. She was shy.

“Hey Ulza-san. I know this won’t sound convincing coming from me, but....I don’t think you should worry that much.”

“Worry?”

“I know that Kyle is hiding something, and I know that whatever it is, it’s got something to do with your Mana.”

“.....”

Ulza’s face tightened. The only reason Ulza is here is because somebody else has access to her Mana.

“All I can say is, that guy does a lot of things that pisses me off, but he would never do something to make me cry. So I’m certain that he would never do anything to hurt you Ulza-san. I’m just going to wait until he speaks up.”

When Ulza saw the smile on Lize’s face, she knew that Lize trusted Kyle. That eased some of the tension.

(or she just couldn’t believe how Lize was so dumb)

“Either way, I just tagged along because I was uneasy about letting him go alone. Ah. But don't worry. If he does anything stupid, I’ll take responsibility and...”

Lize had her fists clenched.

“Just call me Ulza.”

“Huh?”

“What I’m saying is, drop the san.”

“...Okay...Ulza.”

The two laughed.

While the girls were bonding, there was some commotion.

“Let me go!!!! I’m going to go see!!”

“Stop! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?!”

Seran was trying to peek at the girls taking the bath, and Kyle was doing everything he could to stop him.

“It’s an open air bath! Of course I’d look! What’s wrong!?”

Seran screamed with everything he had.

“You’re not going to look?!”

“Of course I want to look!” Kyle replied and began to speak.

“There’s no way I’m letting you see those two! That’s my...”

“Did you just say two?! So it’s not just Lize but also Ulza-chan!!”

“.....”

“Why are you suddenly quiet?”

“You’re annoying! It’s gonna affect our work tomorrow! Just go and sleep already!”

“I don’t care about tomorrow! I’m living this moment right now!”

There was tension building between the two.

“Ugh. Damnit. I failed again today.”

“...you...you’ve wasted my energy.....”

“What are you two doing!? I just washed these clothes you know?!”

Lize came out of the bath and saw the two were grappling. In the process, they had dirt all over the freshly washed clothes Lize had provided.

Needless to say, she wasn’t impressed.

Around noon the next day, Ulza approached Kyle, who had resumed digging after having lunch.

“I never thought to conquer the labyrinth like this. I still feel uneasy about doing it this way....”

“There’s no other way. If we go in from the front, we’ll be destroyed for sure.”

Kyle remembered the time he went through the front.

Although he had a map of all the traps, it wasn't easy getting through. Plus, not all the traps are on the map.

The map itself is a trap as well.

There's some magic infused in the map. Basically, the map is accurate for most part, but once you get to the layer with all the treasure, additional layers appear on the blank areas.

The layer with the treasure can't be reached without going through those layers, but the traps are some of the worst.

Just thinking about how hopeless that experience was sent shivers down Kyle's spine.

He took a look at the signature on the corner of the map.

The signature was written in ancient writing: Sildonia Zares.

The reason for all this digging was simple: Kyle never wanted to enter the labyrinth again, but at the same time, he wanted all the treasure.

"By the way, is Seran back yet?"

Seran took off after having lunch and hasn't returned since.

"He has a nasty habit of slacking off. I remember him saying he'd find a place where he could see from far away...I wonder what he's talking about..."

Ulza tilted her head.

"Don't worry about that. I'm gonna strangle that guy later."

Kyle crushed the cup he was holding in his hand.

"I'm confused. Anyway Kyle, there's something I want to ask you."

Ulza explained that she'd rather ask now since Seran was gone.

"I'm a down to earth kind of person, so I'll get straight to it. Lize and Seran have known you for a long time and they trust you very much, but I'm different. I don't know you very well. So tell me. Why do you want to become a hero?"

When Ulza heard about Kyle's intentions on the way over here, she initially

thought he was some weird kid with unreasonable ambitions.

But as time went by, she realized that Kyle was serious. He had a clear goal in mind, knew what he could do, and what he needed to do. He also hadn't slacked off one tiny bit.

"Your ring. That's part of your training right?"

She looked at the simple ring on Kyle's left hand.

"I see you've noticed. It's a ring that has the gravity spell."

Gravity adjusts the weight of the target. It's normally used to weaken beasts by draining their energy and rendering them powerless. It's also called the Ring of Promise because it's used to take away the power of criminals.

The type of ring that Kyle had on his finger could be instantly deactivated if he wanted to. And unless it was a complete surprise attack, he would have no problem with it.

"With that ring, your weight is probably 2 or 3 times the normal amount right?"

"You're just about right. According to my master, constantly putting on weight is helpful in increasing my base strength. It's simple, but very effective nonetheless. For now, I just want to raise my basic strength. By wearing the ring and digging, it's two birds with one stone."

"At first I thought you were into masochism..."

"Huh?"

"Um... like... you know... You have those weird sexual fantasies... with Lize and... the way you flirt with her... is your method of.... foreplay?"

"What kind of misunderstanding is that!?"

"I mean.. Seran told me that..the way you two flirt is a very high-level type of foreplay... so I shouldn't really take it seriously..."

"That guy... always speaking nonsense..."

"At first I thought it was a very rare type of fantasy... so I was looking down at you while feeling sorry for the human race for being so strange... but it looks

like I was wrong. My bad.”

“No, don’t be. Don’t worry about it.”

Somewhere inside, Kyle felt like crying.

“I’m gonna ask you again. Why do you want to be a hero?”

“Because...”

Just as Kyle was about to say something, there was a loud noise. The shovel hit something very hard.

“Is this....metal? W...We’ve made it!”

The metal was very hard and cold.

The Detect Magic spell was giving it’s strongest feedback so far.

“It’s time for the final approach. We’ve got to tell Lize and Seran.”

Just as Kyle was about to go out, he turned back and told Ulza.

“I’m sorry. I can’t tell you right now. But I promise, when the time comes, I’ll tell Lize and the rest of you.”

Ulza looked at Kyle as he walked out and decided not to press further.

She said to herself,

“For some reason...being with these guys is messing with my mind...”

Chapter 5

“Wow....”

“This is....”

“Waaaaa...”

Seran, Ulza, and Lize each said something before they were at a loss of words.

Once they tore through the outer layer of metal, they were in a large warehouse filled with treasure. The place was as big as 10 homes put together.

The mountain of treasure included rings, necklaces, and statues. There were also tapestries and crystals and gems of all sorts.

Most of these things cannot be replicated with today’s technology. Merchants and aristocrats aren’t the only ones who would pay for these treasures. Royalties would also pay a significant amount to buy this stuff.

There were also coins from the ancient times. Hundreds of thousands of coins were scattered everywhere. It was literally a mountain of treasure.

There were rubies, diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, topaz, opal, pearls, and other minerals.

Herbs were also in the pile. These herbs were used as ingredients to make magic medicine. Other ingredients like unicorn horns and dragon skin were also neatly stacked.

The items had the Preservation spell cast upon them; even after a thousand years, everything looked fresh.

In the corner was an ingot of mithril. Mithril is a light and durable element that has the ability to increase resistance to magic. It’s used in weapons and defense items, but it’s so rare that select dwarf races are the only one to mine this.

It’s dozens of times more valuable than gold and it’s something that you can’t just buy with money.

This amount of treasure would be enough to buy several countries.

Though the amount is impressive, it was an appropriate amount. The magic kingdom, Zares, spread across half of the entire landmass when it was at its peak. This meant it controlled $\frac{1}{4}$ of the entire human population. It was believed that with such power, the humans could defeat the demons.

The king during that time, Sildonia Zares, was the one that left all this treasure. It's no surprise that he left so much considering his status.

Regardless of how humble an individual was, that person will definitely be struck with awe. In a sense, it was a dangerous charm.

Lize and Ulza were both speechless. They absentmindedly stood there and looked around.

Only Kyle, who knew this place, was calm.

Lize and Ulza slowly made their way to the treasure when Kyle softly but firmly reminded them: "Don't get carried away."

The two were in a state of shock; they shivered before looking back at Kyle.

"Listen. The reason I'm here is because I need money to achieve my goals. Money is nothing more than a tool. It's definitely better to have some, and it's good to handle it effectively. But be careful not to be thrown around by money."

It sounds a bit harsh but someone had to say it because there are countless people who lead miserable lives from their wealth.

"To show you what I'm talking about...take a look over there!"

Kyle pointed.

"Hyahaaaa!! It's money!!! I can finally live a luxurious life!!"

Seran threw himself onto the pile of coins and rolled around.

"...that is an example of what happens when you let money control you."

"I'm rich!!!"

Seran scooped up coins and started throwing it, pretending it was raining coins.

"You're right. That doesn't look too pretty."

“I definitely don’t want to end up like that.”

The two looked at Seran with pity. They shook their heads in disapproval.

Watching Seran helped them calm down, and they began to calmly look around the stacks of treasure. (Thank you Seran...Thanks to you, I’m sure these two won’t be controlled by money. It sounds trivial, but I’m starting to think that bringing you along wasn’t a mistake after all.)

Kyle looked at Seran, who was still rolling around in coins, with a gentle look.

The last time Kyle came here was two months ago, from his previous life.

That time, the economy was already in shambles, and even with all of this treasure, it wouldn’t mean much. Moreover, at that time, bread was more important than gold, silver, and gems.

The dwarf craftsmen were able to create weapons and shields using the mithril, and the alchemists were able to stir up some magic medicine.

Without those items, the last battle would have been lost.

While the three were distracted by the treasures, Kyle silently headed towards the back.

The ginormous statues and mountains of jewelry covered him from sight.

There was a big sword on the pedestal. It was a bastard sword; one that could be carried with one hand or both.

The blade of the sword was polished, and there were letters written in ancient magic language.

On the hilt was a red gem. Clearly, it had some strong magical powers.

The sword was probably made of mithril. It was well balanced, and one look would be enough for anyone to know it was a legendary sword.

It was a beautiful sword. One could keep staring at it. It was so peculiar that it would make people feel like they were being sucked in.

Kyle took a deep breath rather quickly, and stepped forward. At that moment, the sword emitted a light. The particles of light gather in front of the sword and

created an image of a little girl.

From the look of it, the girl looks around 12 or 13. She had white hair and was dressed in a loose robe. She had her eyes closed.

Slowly, she opened her eyes.

She spoke in a clear and stern voice.

“Well done for surviving the long ordeal. I must congratulate you for survi....whaaa?”

She couldn't finish. Kyle held her mouth shut and carried her to the corner of the room.

“Don't talk too loudly! They'll hear us!”

Kyle peeked at the two, and made sure they didn't notice.

The little girl tried to break free and spoke in an angry voice.

“You inconsiderate person! Who do you think I am?!”

“I told you to not speak loudly! I know who you are. You're Sildonia Zares. The Magic King.”

Actually it's a replica, Kyle whispered.

“The real one is in the gem on the sword. That gem has part of Sildonia's personality and his knowledge embedded within. You were a shadow made of magic. Right?”

“H...how do you know? The original Sildonia and myself are the only ones who should know this!”

Sildonia panicked, but she replied in a soft voice.

“Also, I know the questions you're about to ask, as well as the answers to all of them, so can we just skip all of that please?”

“But...that's my time to show off...and isn't that why you're here?...wait....how do you know all of this?!”

Obviously, Kyle knew the questions and their answers from their previous encounter.

“Fine fine...The answers are...a dragon to the east of the second layer, a wolf to the west of the third layer, demons to the north of the fifth layer, and a large painting of the human race on the south of the sixth layer....not very nice of you to ask questions regarding rooms that I didn't even have to go through.”

“Wow! So you went through all of them!! Wait..why do you know the answers!?”

“Well, to be honest, I took a shortcut this time, so I didn't go through any of them.”

“Shortcut?”

“We dug a hole on the opposite side directly to this treasure.”

“Why did you do that!? You know this is also part of Sildonia's grave?!”

“Special circumstances. Let me do the final test. You'll understand. I'm gonna grab the sword now.”

“...so you know about that too??”

“Yeah. I think if I do this, you'll understand.”

Kyle grabbed the sword that was on the pedestal.

Sildonia was even more surprised.

“What!? Who are you!?”

“Hurry up and read it! If this'll convince you, you won't have to use the final trap right?”

“?!.....fine fine, take it out!!”

Sildonia's body became a bunch of light particles once again, and were sucked into the sword's gem. At the same time, Kyle removed the sword.

Just as the particles of light were engulfing Kyle, they disappeared as well. Sildonia's shadow appeared once again, but she had a very troubled look on her face.

“.....Time travel.....is this real.....?”

“*Perfect Reading* reveals everything right? Then it must be. I also have the

Heart of Shinryu with me.”

Perfect Reading is a special class of magic that is lost today. It reveals all of the target’s experiences and memories and personalities.

The user practically knows everything about the target’s life and deceit is futile. Even things that the target has forgotten will be revealed. The last time Kyle encountered Sildonia, she explained this to him.

The spell is activated by gripping the sword. Sildonia tested those who were able to make it this far to determine if they were worthy of keeping the treasure. It was the final test.

“...Such a convenient magic doesn’t exist. I mean, certainly, you could read parts of the person’s memory, but it’s just a bluff.”

“Oi! It was a bluff?!”

“Either way, you cant’ lie and you know some things that only I would know. Most importantly, your soul is proof of this.”

“Soul?”

“...Your....Your magic level has increased since the last time you came here. Am I right?”

“You know why?”

Kyle asked out of curiosity.
Until now, he just let it be.

“Hmph, so the hypothesis that I made earlier proved to be true. But I didn’t think that I’d actually meet you in person.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Explaining will take some time...anyways, how many people are with you? Are they your friends?”

“Oh snap....they’ll notice soon for sure. Here’s the deal. They know nothing. So let’s get our story straight.”

“So you haven’t told anyone about this yet?”

“It’d be a confusing matter...but I knew you’d figure it out anyways...”

“I suppose you’re right. I had no choice though, since the fate of the human race was at stake.”

Sildonia had to cooperate. She let out a sigh.

“Ok here we go... Oh wow!! A talking sword!!! And it’s name is Sildonia Zares!?!?”

“That was a bit too fake...”

“Sorry about that, I briefly lost control of myself after looking at all the treasure.”

Seran pretended to be normal, but neither Ulza nor Lize were paying any attention.

Since there was an important figure right in front of them, it would make sense that the two ignored Seran.

Lize didn’t have any words to say as she stared at the King from over a thousand years ago who looked just like a kid.

They decided to take a break inside the treasure room. Sildonia deliciously ate the baked goods that Lize had brought with her.

“Hpmh, this actually tastes quite good. The food during this age isn’t that bad after all. Did you make this?”

“Ah, yes. I used a lot of juice and honey in it...anyways, are you really the Magic King?”

“Actually, I’m only a part of it. I’m based off of part of the Magic King who is stored inside the gem on the sword. I’m Sildonia Zares, but at the same time, I am my own independent self.”

Sildonia was talking about herself, but spoke as if she was talking about someone else.

Magical beings like the one in front of them are oftentimes synthetic chimeras or some sort. They are made by alchemists. In the ancient magic kingdoms, they were made quite often, but over time, the methods of making it were lost and because of the difficulty and high level of magic it requires, it’s seldom researched today.

“Everything I eat and drink is converted into magical power, so nothing goes to waste....hmm...it’s been approximately a thousand years since I last ate....not bad..”

She says it as if it were no big deal, but converting food to magical power would be unthinkable with today’s alchemy methods. It was too difficult. One could sense at the high level of alchemy that existed in ancient times.

“But why are you in the form of a child?”

“This is the original form of Sildonia you know? She used magic to stop aging when she was the strongest. She remained like this until her death.”

“I see~ But I’ve never heard of that story before.”

Since Sildonia is a legend, there are many stories about her. But they’ve never heard of her being in the form of a little girl.

“It’s been over a thousand years. Those stories evolve over time into something tremendously far from the truth. She didn’t really show her face in front of people to begin with...”

She said that that was probably one of the reasons why. She seemed uninterested throughout.

“But why would she preserve her form?”

Ulza asked the question that everyone was asking about.

“There is a reason. It’s regarding the inheritance of all of this treasure. It’s not state property or anything. It’s all private property.”

“All of this is private property? You’ve gotta be kidding me. No wonder people have been fighting over it.”

Seran spoke while looking around.

It wouldn’t be surprising if a war broke out over who would control the treasures.

“She had no heirs to pass along the property, so when she died, so she sealed the treasure when she died. She would only give the treasure to those who pass

all the traps and things placed in the labyrinth.”

“So that’s why all these traps are here...”

Just looking at the map gave an idea of how many traps there were scattered across the area.

“That’s just a hobby. It’s quite effective.”

“I see...”

“Very few were able to even get to the labyrinth. I wasn’t expecting anyone to actually make it through..”

Sildonia shook her head.

“The plan was to place a final test. Those who pass would get the treasure. Those who didn’t would suffer the last trap.”

“The last trap?”

“The caving in of the entire place. I can do that in an instant. I would bury everyone who made it here alive.”

Again, she said it as if it were no big deal, but everyone except Kyle turned blue.

“But if you do that, even you’ll be buried alive!”

“I’m a sword now. It doesn't matter if I’m buried alive. All I have to do is sleep for a thousand years or maybe two thousand years. The next person who finds this place....well...it’s not any use to think of that right now is it..”

She kept calm throughout, but the three were panicking. They looked at the ceiling, thinking it would collapse on them at any moment.

“Normally, those who cheat their way through the labyrinth by digging a hole directly to here would make me want to activate the last trap without any exception...but...”

Sildonia looked at Kyle, but he was busy drinking his tea.

“You’re a quite interesting group of people so you can relax. But there is one condition. I need to watch you guys so you have to take me with you wherever you’re going.”

Sildonia wanted to take a look at the outside world for the first time in a thousand years. Of course, the three were nodding away.

Saying 'no' here would mean everyone would be buried in an instant. That would be a total waste of all the effort.

"...So why are you a sword again? If you're a Magic King, couldn't you have been something more magical?"

Seran looked at the sword in front of Kyle's hands. As a swordsman himself, Seran was very curious.

"To be honest, the original Sildonia never told me. It could be just a coincidence. Without her, I'll never know."

Sildonia looked at the distance.

"Anyways, as long as I'm a sword, I'll have to be used as a sword. I have to choose a user, but I think Kyle would be good."

"I also request that."

"I will be of great use."

Kyle knew that her words were nothing but the truth. She was very confident.

Kyle knew her for only a month, but she was very useful. Even during the last battle.

"Until the person wielding the sword dies, I'll have to stick to the very end."

After saying that during the final battle, she was able to allow Kyle to win against the demon king.

But at the same time, it meant that Sildonia would be destroyed.

In essence, it was a reunion of those who were never supposed to meet again.

Sildonia was still munching on the food. Kyle was looking at her. In his mind, he thanked her for everything.

"Hey hey! I'm also a swordsman. How about choosing me over Kyle?"

Seran smiled at Sildonia.

Sildonia looked at Seran as if she were putting a price on him.

She quickly shook her head and said: "...Nope...it's psychologically impossible."

"You always get rejected like that. I suppose even a thousand years ago people couldn't stand you."

Lize nodded.

"I can't disagree. I suppose those things don't change over time."

Ulza agreed.

"Don't worry. The world is spacious. There'll be someone who'll accept you."

Kyle tapped Seran's shoulders and consoled him.

"Damn....I feel like crying..."

Chapter 6

The Zilgs Kingdom is at the center of a large continent.

It borders demon territory but it's land is very suited for agriculture. It's climate is also warm. Under Remonaz, the current ruling King, Zilgs is a very stable country that is continuously growing.

There's no official ranking on the countries strength, but if there were, the Zilgs Kingdom would be ranked very highly, near the top.

The capital, Mallad, is surrounded by two layers of thick walls, and has a population nearing 200,000. The royal palace at the center of Mallad can be seen from anywhere in the capital and the country's land seems as if were radiating outward from the palace.

"Ho~ there's so many people! The people in this era look very prosperous!"

Sildonia was using magic to create an illusion of herself as she walked through the streets that were flooded with vendors.

Kyle and his friends just arrived at Mallad. Sildonia was right. The streets were flooded with people. "I heard Mallad has a population of 1,000,000." Lize said that with such a large population, such a scenery wasn't something to be shocked at.

"You're right. But that's only from what I've been told. I don't know from experience. Sildonia herself had never walked through such a crowd and neither have I."

"So that's why..."

Kyle was wondering why Sildonia kept asking questions on the way. Her existence was a very unbalanced one: she was full of knowledge but lacked any experience whatsoever.

Sildonia was attracted by the scent and moved towards one of the vendors. Lize forced a smile on her face and followed.

"She's like a kid from a rural village visiting the city for the first time."

Seran is a whole different story, but in fact, Seran and Lize are very similar. Neither of them have left Rimaze for a long time, and it's the first time either of them have been to Mallad. The way they looked around the city made it very easy to tell that they were from out of town.

“Hmph, it doesn’t taste as good as Lize’s food, but it’s quite good. Let’s see... up next is that vendor...” Sildonia was carrying a meat skewer as she returned. BEcase she needed to convert the food to magic power, she ate a lot.

“Eat later, I want to go buy the stuff we planned.”

“Stuff...as in...weapons and shields?”

“Right, we wouldn’t stand a chance with the equipment we have right now. It’s better if we have higher quality items.”

Their current equipment consisted of Sildonia, working as Kyle’s sword. Everyone else’s equipment was just a little better than that of an average journeyman.

“We can upgrade our current equipment, but there would be limits. With our current strength, new, higher grade material will enhance our abilities exponentially.”

He added on that it’ll also reduce the chances of them getting killed.

Over the past year, Kyle had lost so many loved ones – he didn't want to lose any more.

“If we can avoid getting killed by buying better equipment, it’s a cheap price to pay. No need to be cheap.” In a big city like Mallad, there were several different places to buy goods from.

Of course, the stores had different levels: stores for novices, intermediates, and professionals. The place Kyle’s team was heading toward was without a doubt the highest class store around.

Only noblemen and journeymen who earn tens of thousands of Gadoru per assignment can afford the items there.

The store was built with stone, and had no signs.

There were no signs because signs weren’t needed. Only people with a

particular purpose would come to the store. In other words, it wasn't the type of store where one would just walk in randomly or by accident.

There were several armed guards at the entrance. Only one of them was wearing a uniform for the store. He spoke to Kyle as he approached the entrance.

"What can I help you with?"

"Ah, I want to buy items."

"I don't mean to be rude, but do you have a referral?"

"No."

"Are you familiar with our policy of first time customers with no referral?"

"If I remember correctly, those without referrals who are completely new have to pay a deposit in order to enter the store."

Kyle remembered from his previous life.

"You're correct. I apologize for the inconvenience, but we ask all new customers to make a deposit of 10,000 Gadoru. Of course, it will be returned upon your departure from the store."

The boy was somewhat apologetic, but firm nonetheless.

The store has many very expensive items on display. Noblemen have their identities confirmed, but most of the customers who visit this store are armed journeymen.

The store has to be on the safe side to prevent any armed robberies.

As a result, the store normally doesn't allow customers without a referral to enter. However, that doesn't mean that they turn all of them away. The deposit system ensures that only safe customers are let in the store. If they can't afford the initial deposit, there is no way that they will be able to afford anything in the store. Hence, they have no purpose of being there.

"5 pieces of Zares gold. Is that enough?"

Kyle handed the boy Zares gold, a currency from the ancient magical kingdom period. It had very tiny engravings and even had a preservation spell. As a

result, even a thousand years later, there are many of them in circulation. Many stores that sell expensive items also accept it as currency.

Zares gold has twice the value of the highest denomination, which was worth 1,000 Gadoru.

Though not produced anymore, there is an even more high value currency that is worth 10,000 Gadoru that uses precious gems. Those are often used for investments or rituals and are seldom found circulating.

“Thank you. Right this way please.”

Beyond the heavy door was a hallway.

At the end of the hallway was another heavy door.

For added protection, there were 2 doors. On the other end of the second door was a spacious floor.

There were no windows, but magic items with the *light* spell had lit up the room.

In addition, the moisture and temperature were adjusted perfectly to ensure maximum comfort.

And on the counters and were armor and weapons neatly organized.

Possibly due to the time, there were no other customers in the store.

The store wasn't meant to attract large numbers of people at once in the first place.

“Welcome! I am Fesiba, the owner of this store.”

A wide man in his 50's greeted Kyle and his friends as they walked in.

For first timers, either the owner of the store or one of the sales associates are assigned to stay with them at all times.

They determine the type of customer you are and whether the store can make money off of you. They then adjust their services accordingly.

Fesiba had a great smile on his face but watched Kyle with a keen eye.

“What can we do for you today?”

“We want to see your weapons and shields.”

“Certainly. We have a lot of weapons and shields. Let me show you.”

There are many kinds of magic items.

Some are simply enhanced while other are made lightweight. Some are speceially made for users of fire or ice, and still others are made to defend against those types.

There are several other types, but they’re not made that often these days.

To put magic in a weapon or shield takes more effort than a simple magic item. It also costs more, so most of the items on the market were made during the rule of the ancient magic kingdom.

“Whoa. I see lots of things from Zares. Oh! This one’s made by Melanis!”

Sildonia commented on some of the things she saw.

“You sure do know a lot. This one was indeed made by Melanis, one of the most famous craftsmen in the old days...”

“Not really. I mean, he did make some neat items, but when I criticized some of his work, he started tearing up. I’m sure he’s realized his mistakes by now.”

“Huh?”

“Oh, don’t pay attention, she’s kinda crazy.”

Kyle whispered to make sure she couldn't hear.

“Huh? Oh...Okay...I see...”

Fesba looked around the store and caught the attention of another store employee. She led Sildonia to a consulting table.

“Hm? What is it? Oh wow! These snacks look delicious!”

Since this store dealt with rich customers, their snacks were also top quality.

Sildonia began eating.

Kyle gave a light bow, apologizing for her behavior. Fesba also smiled. He presumably understood the difficulty that she was giving Kyle and his friends.

“Oh! Could this be?”

What caught Kyle's eye was a light blue colored armor suit in a glass display case. It was probably the most expensive item in the entire store. It was displayed so that it would get everyone's attention. It was known as leather armor, and emphasized speed. It also used a special type of leather.

"Dragon leather armor...and does it have magic on it as well?"

"Yes, it has magic to increase resistance, defense, hardness, magic resistance, heat resistance, cold resistance, and it's also been made lightweight. Inside, phoenix wings are sewn."

Fesba was probably asked the same question before; he knew what he was talking about.

"Phoenix, as in the phantom monster?"

Among the monsters, there exists a thing

that uses intellect to command language and use magic.

They were their own category and were called phantoms.

The number of phantoms is extremely small, but most of them, including dragons, were very powerful.

"Yes, it is a phantom monster as strong as a dragon. It's the epitome of life, so it has resistance against poison and sickness. Also, although it's a small amount, it does have an automatic health recovery function."

The store owner did a fantastic job of selling the armor to Kyle. It was, indeed, one of the best armors around.

The price tag was under the display case.

3,000,000 Gadoru.

You could buy a castle with the land and several servants in the capital with that kind of money. For one armor, this price was an outlier.

"...And over here we have our armor...."

"Okay, I'll take this one!"

"What?!"

Fesba's eyes grew very wide, but Kyle had already started talking to Seran.

"Seran, this should fit you in terms of size. What do you say?"

Seran was busy talking to the female sales associate so he wasn't too interested.

"Hm~ I'm not a big fan of the blue coloring...I want a passionate color like blue, red, or black. I'll pass on this one."

"Fine, then I'll take this one. So now I have armor and a sword. I'm all set. Now there's Ulza and Lize....Can you please show me the items for women please?"

Kyle was completely calm, but Fesba's eyes were still very wide.

Afterwards, he bought Ulza a mithril silver breastplate and a dagger. Spiritual magicians don't like metal like steel and bronze, so they often don't have any defensive items.

However, magical metal like mithril silver was an exception.

He also bought an amulet using a precious stone that is said to be found only in the spiritual world.

It is said that putting this on reduces the distance between the user and the spirits.

In fact, Ulza recalled that she felt a special relationship form with the spirits the moment she put the amulet on.

"I heard that the leader of the village neighboring mine owned one...but the quality of this one is unheard of...With this, I'll probably be able to form contracts with high level spirits."

Needless to say, Ulza was quite excited.

For Lize, he bought gauntlets to protect her arms.

They were also made of mithril.

They also had magic to make it sturdy yet lightweight.

With these, Lize would be able to dispel simple sword attacks with ease.

For her body, he bought cloth armor, to put emphasis on ease of movement. The cloth armor also had the *protect* spell cast on it, so it was actually sturdier than the average metal armor.

“Feels great!”

Lize made several steps and jumps to check the fit, and confirmed that there were no problems.

“Do you have any other armor made of dragon leather?”

Kyle asked Fesba.

If possible, he was looking for dragon leather armor that even Lize would be able to move comfortably in.

“Unfortunately, we’re out of stock at the moment...these items rarely come around, so even in our store, we only have a limited supply.”

“I see...”

Kyle continued, and whispered to Sildonia who was still eating.

“Didn’t we have dragon leather?”

“Um..yeah..we have enough to process. In fact, we have the leather from the old dragon, like the armor here, that uses young dragon leather. If we’re talking about armor, we can easily make 10 or even 20.”

For some reason, Sildonia seemed proud of herself.

She would’ve sounded much cooler if she didn't have chocolate all around her mouth.

“Then itd be easier if we have them made to order. But then again, there are only so many leather craftsmen around these days...”

Kyle lamented the difficulty of simply finding someone who could process the leather and make something out of it.

He let out a small sigh.

Now all that’s left was Seran.

“Do you have armor that would make a girl as pretty as you fall for me just by

putting it on?”

Kyle shook his head at Seran, who was dead-serious.

“For this guy, can you prepare a one-handed longsword, and for defensive armor, can you get some leather armor? If you’re out of stock, some used rag would work as well.”

“Hagh....Yes sir.”

The female sales associate dealing with Seran in a strictly professional manner replied with a tight face.

“Also, we need some magic stones and magic medicine.”

“Yes sir..”

Magic stones are stones that are fined and have magic placed in them. Because they are a single use item that cost quite a lot, they’re not used often. However, because it allows even a low level magician to cast high grade spells, most journeymen carry one or two with them just in case.

“For attack spells, we have in stock the *explosion* stone.”

Fesba took out a small black stone that fit on his palm. There were magic letters carved into the stone.

Explosion is a mid level magic that causes an explosion.

It’s used best against groups of enemies.

“Read the magic letters as you trace your finger over the. The letters will light up and the magic will take effect in 5 seconds. During that time, throw the stone towards the enemy.”

Fesba explained how to use the stone.

“Magic medicine is normally ingested through drinks.”

As he said this, he showed Kyle several small vials containing a liquid substance.

There are medicines that heal injuries, cure sicknesses, and the highest level medicine can regenerate lost limbs in an instant.

Magic stones and magic medicine are both single use items, but the ones in this store all cost at least 1,000 Gadoru.

“So many useful items. By the way, do you have any magic stones that are effective against reptiles?”

“I heard fire isn’t that effective against them, and neither is lightning...I suppose your best bet is an ice type. Not only will it damage the enemy but it will also slow it down. It won’t always be effective on dragons, but it should work against Wyverns and Hydras.”

“I knew it had to be an ice type...Do you have magic stones with the *blizzard* spell?”

Blizzard is a mid level magic spell that creates an icy blizzard over a certain area. Kyle has the ability to use this spell.

However, using this spell requires tremendous amounts of focus and concentration.

Casting it in the middle of an intense battle requires lots of practice. Given the current circumstances, that would be hard for Kyle.

To compensate, he would use the stones which requires no concentration.

“Yes, we do. However, putting ice spells in magic stones requires advanced technology, so they’re slightly more expensive...”

“Great, we’ll take everything you have. They’re all useful.”

“Huh?!”

Fesba took a look at the over 100 stones lined up on the countertop.

“Also, I need magic medicine. Since we have no healers in our party. I’ll take all of those too.”

“...”

“Also,”

“Yes!?”

Fesba was clearly in shock.

“We’ll probably be returning quite often, so if you could, can you please stock up on everything?”

“...Huh.....”

That’s all Fesba could say at the moment.

“How... how would you like to make your payment?”

Kyle had finished shopping, and Fesba was trying very hard to keep on a professional smile.

Given that the total came out to be more than 10,000,000 Gadoru, it's no surprise that Kyle had managed to get every sales associate's attention.

The look on their faces had an element of fear mixed in.

“It'll be too many if I pay with coins. Do you mind if I mix in jewels?”

If Kyle decided to pay everything in 1 Gadoru coins, the entire store would be buried.

“Since it's quite a sum, we'd actually prefer you do so....”

Kyle agreed and proceeded to take out an Apport bag.”

There's a maximum grade spell called Apport that allows the user to retrieve items from a specific location. The bag is a magic item that has the same abilities.

The bag was connected to the treasure room where Kyle and his friends just came from.

By using the apport bag, Kyle was able to retrieve anything from the mound of treasure in that room.

The room is part of a labyrinth that is over 1,000 years old, so he decided that it would be better to just keep the treasure there and seal the entrances.

It's better to play it safe; had he taken out the treasure, he might have lost it or worse, he might have been robbed.

Kyle was assigned to manage the treasure in that room.

Sildonia was appalled when she had heard that Kyle and his teammates had not discussed how the treasure would be divided.

After a short discussion, it was decided that Kyle would be in charge.

The apport bag itself is a rather expensive item, so Fesba was slightly surprised when Kyle took it out; however, as he started taking out coins, rubies,

diamonds, and emeralds from the bag, Fesba was stunned. He couldn't do much besides just stand there in shock and awe.

A special person in charge of determining the authenticity immediately took a look at the coins and gems.

One look was enough to determine that everything was in fact, real.

Not only were they authentic, everything Kyle had taken out from the bag was worth at least 100,000 Gadoru a piece.

"Um...I'm very sorry, but we have to determine the exact value of each of these, so it might take some time..."

"That's fine. Do you mind if we try on the equipment in the meantime?"

They were allowed to try on everything. Everything except for the dragon leather armor, that is.

"Y...yes...of course."

After a while, Fesba, who was clearly drained but still had his smile on, talked to Kyle.

"We've counted everything up. You're all set... How is the equipment? Is everything fine?"

Kyle had on a blue armor and a cloak. He also had a sword on his back.

"Are you guys all set?"

Lize and Uzla nodded, but Seran seemed uncomfortable.

"What's wrong?"

"No...the equipment is fine...It's just...I couldn't even get her number..."

"I don't care."

"Neither do I."

Kyle didn't know what to say when she saw that Sildonia had received a whole bunch of snacks.

"...Well.....whatever makes you happy....Anyways, we'll be back soon, so please stock up on your items!"

Fesba made sure that he guided Kyle and his companions towards the entrance.

Kyle had broken the record for the daily sales by a significant margin, and the staff members were all exhausted.

“Who were they?”

One of them talked to Fesba.

“I have no clue...but ...we don’t know them...so that means they can’t be any famous journeymen...”

Fesba made sure to remember the faces of his regulars.

“They paid in Zares gold and jewels... so it could be that they were novices who were lucky and hit the jackpot.”

“That seems to be the most reasonable explanation... But what kind of treasure has that much worth?”

“Maybe it’s the legendary... Demon King’s labyrinth...”

“Possibly.”

Fesba and his fellow workers laughed.

“We made a huge profit but it’s bad for my blood pressure... Oh dear... we’ve run out of stock. We must call the factories at once and restock our supply of magic stones and magic medicine.”

“Yes, sir.”

Chapter 7

After shopping, Kyle and the others finished their lunch and lodged in an inn. It was a prominent and honorable place where foreign nobles and other people of high standing would stay, and given its scale, it was more suitable to call it a hotel rather than an inn.

"Still, that was one flashy shopping spree. Aren't we going to attract an awful lot of attention?"(Seran)

After everyone gathered in one of the two rooms provided in their lodging, Seran spoke up while looking at what the group had purchased. They had bought 10 millions Gadors worth of goods, he was probably trying to say that this could spread some bad rumors and make the party stand out.

"That store is used by aristocrats and the like, so the personnel won't easily leak information about the customers."(Kyle)

Customer trust was a lifeline in the service trade. It was out of the question for them to tell unrelated people about what their clients had bought.

"But well, a story like this one is gonna leak from somewhere or another, even if it doesn't spread instantly. We'll be leaving tomorrow morning, there won't be a problem if we stay for just a day."(Kyle)

Besides, as long as they stayed in this hotel, the party's security was not going to be a problem.

"Is that so... Wait, what?! We went through all that trouble to come to the royal capital and we're only staying for one night?"(Seran)

"Yeah, we only came here to do some shopping. We're on a pretty tight schedule, after this we have to head to...."(Kyle)

"No way I'm letting things go this way then! I'll be out for a while!"(Seran)

While saying that, Seran rushed out of the hotel.

"Well then, I'll go look around for a bit, too. It's my first time in the capital, I want to enjoy myself a little."(Lize)

As Lize stood up to go out, Ulza offered to accompany her.

"Let's go together. I've been here before so I can show you around a little."
(*Ulza*)

"Thanks, then I'll be depending on you, Ulza."(*Lize*)

Looking at Lize and Ulza as they left together, Kyle had a slightly complex expression on his face.

"Those two sure are getting along..."

"As for me, I'll buy some sweets-I mean, I'll do some shopping... Let's go."

Although Sildonia started heading out, Kyle stopped her.



"Hold on. There is a lot we have to discuss, plus I want to ask you about that thing."

So far in their journey, there was no instance when the two of them were left by themselves.

Sildonia was the only one who knew about Kyle's circumstances, and given that she had knowledge from the ancient magic kingdom, she was more than a fitting choice to answer his concerns.

"Ah... Don't worry, I didn't forget about that, and I wasn't too preoccupied my appetite to think about it either, not at all. Yeah."

Although Sildonia sat down to face him, her reluctance to do so did not escape Kyle's eyes.

"First, I want you confirm this.... Can I really change the future?"

This was what Kyle was the most anxious about.

He was trying to change the future, but if said future could not be altered, then there was no meaning to his actions.

"Change it? That's an odd term to use. The future is the future because it has yet to happen, it's not set. So, you're free to make it into whatever you want it to be."

"It's not set.... But all those things that happened to me were real, right?"

"You're wrong. While going back through time, you also came to another world. None of you experiences have occurred in this world, and so, its future has yet to be decided."

"This is just my own hypothesis but..." Starting by saying that, Sildonia kept explaining.

"Time is not a single line, it's more like a tree branching out in countless directions, and your soul has moved from one of those branches to another. Perhaps this will sound like I'm playing with words, but you did not exactly come to the past. It's just that your soul came to this world while carrying the memories and experiences you gathered in another world."

As one of the proofs of her hypothesis, Sildonia pointed at Kyle's『Divine dragon's heart』.

"Since it was used as the catalyst for the transfer, the『Divine dragon's heart』 came to this world together with your soul. Originally, there was only a single divine dragon's heart in the world, but now there are two: The one right here, and the one that was in this world from the start, it's probably located in the demonic territory... For two instances of one same object to exist at the same point in time is already an inconsistency in itself, by this point, you can consider that this world and the world you came from are completely different, no matter how similar they appear to be."

"I kind of understand, but I'm still lost... Then, could it be that there are going to be other things in this world that are different from what I know?"

"No, the trunk's branches are all the exact same. And that fact did not change until when you, an outsider, came in, at which point those similar branches got divided into other different branches, but outside of your influence and mine, things will go roughly the same way they did in your memory. Everything happens because of the accumulation of the happenings that came before it, and the happenings that were accumulated before your arrival are all exactly the same as they were in your previous branch. Therefore... the『Great invasion』is going to happen."

"I see."

When told that this was a different world, Kyle had had some light expectations, but it seemed like he had been overly optimistic.

"...But we can prepare ourselves to face the invasion, right?"

"Well, just from the fact you're getting to learn things from me like this, your experience should be different than it was in your previous world, you've already somewhat altered the future. So you can do whatever you want, your actions will depend on you only."

"Just knowing that is enough for me."

What he was doing, or rather, was he was trying to do, was not meaningless at all, Kyle was fine as long as he knew that.

"You plan to increase your fame and therefore raise your influence in order to prepare a framework for cooperation between the human tribes before the great invasion... that's actually an excellent idea. It's just that it will bring you many difficulties."

"What are you talking about? I have a lot of trump cards, and I even have the legendary Magic King with me. So there is nothing absurd about my plan, right?"

Sildonia showed a broad and daring smile in response to Kyle's words.

"Well then, next, I've deduced the reason behind your increase in magical power."

"Ooh, I'd like to hear about that."

Kyle leaned forward in curiosity. After all, he did not understand this matter at all, even though it concerned his own body.

"To explain this, I should first explain what is magical power. Magical power is a part of the soul, so it's safe to assume it cannot be separated from it, correct?"

"Yeah."

"In addition, among the forbidden spells, there is a unification spell called【Fusion】, do you know about it?"

"No, I haven't heard of it."

Even Kyle, who was quite knowledgeable about magic, had never heard of this spell.

"Mhm, seems like it was successfully buried in history. The real me sealed it because it was too dangerous."

".... So, what kind of spell is it?"

"Putting it simply, it's a dark art that makes it possible to drastically increase one's mana by absorbing a soul in order to fuse with it."

In Zares, there were extensive studies about the strengthening of mana, thanks to which the kingdom came up with various methods to increase mana, such as training etc... However, at the end of the day, the mana's power was largely controlled by the natural quality of the soul.

Therefore, they thought out a method to strengthen the soul itself, by using a spell to fuse souls between them.

However, a soul was both the life and the very nature of a person. And just like there is no such thing as two human beings who are exactly the same, a soul was completely different from one person to another.

"But fusing with another person's soul is like increasing a beer's volume by adding melted chocolate in it. Upon doing that, the two people's memories and personalities would get mixed up. An ordinary human being's mind would not be able to handle that and the person would go insane."

"So that fusion is completely useless."

Becoming stronger would be for naught if the price to pay was to lose one's mind.

"And so, to minimize those effects, they decided to use pure souls that had yet to have a sense of self."

"Don't tell me they...."

"Yes, I'm talking about the souls of newborn infants."

"Shit..."

Kyle covered his face with his hand.

A spell that could absorb a baby's soul to strengthen one's mana, it was only natural for that to be a forbidden magic.

"That being said, even a newborn infant is an individual person. Upon fusing with its soul and absorbing it, the other person's soul would still be affected accordingly, and no normal human being would be willing to do such a devilish act anyway. And so, at the time, I came up with a certain hypothesis. If you were to fuse two souls which are exactly the same, then all those problems would not happen..."

There was no such thing as a soul that was identical to another, but if it did not exist, then it only meant that they would have to make one themselves. Following that thought process, the Zares kingdom started researching artificial souls.

"Making a soul... Thinking about it now, you'd really have to fear no god to dare to do such a thing."

"Such arrogance" added Sildonia, with a bitter smile. However, in those days, most people in Zares believed without a doubt that humans would surpass the gods sooner or later.

"Well, in any case, the research to make identical souls was a complete failure in the end and this magic was sealed since it was too dangerous... Now then,

like I said earlier, both the Divine dragon's heart and your soul have come here, and yet there is another Divine dragon's heart somewhere in this world. So, what do you think happened to the soul of the Kyle Leonard of this world?"

"What happened to his soul...? Don't tell me it...?!"

"Yes, it's right here."

Sildonia pointed at Kyle's chest.

"Mhm, but don't misunderstand. The you who's speaking to me right now is still the Kyle Leonard who was in this world from the start."

"Please hold on a second... I'm still confused."

Kyle groaned with his head between his hands.

"Don't think about it so hard. That type of fusion occurs without the awareness of the one concerned."

"Besides, it's a perfect fusion" She added.

"The Kyle who came here from the other world had much more powerful feelings, hence why his will came out so strongly in your character, but the memories and experiences of the both of you until you reached the age of 16 are completely identical, and you individuality and souls are the same as well. In other words, this was akin to mixing two batches of colorless and transparent water. The fusion went without a hitch, therefore doubling the might of your soul. And the whole process happened entirely outside of your notice."

"So you're saying all of that happened to my soul..."

Still, in a way, Kyle partly understood what Sildonia meant.

Even since his hometown was destroyed, he had kept on fighting and killing day after day. He was aware that his mind had gone wild and that he had become apathetic.

But now, his mind was softer, and he felt like the easygoing personality he previously had in this time period was returning.

He believed that the reason for this was his meeting with Lize and the others, whom he had never expected to meet again, and his return to the life he had in his hometown, but the fusion of his souls likely had something to do with it as well.

"... Well, I guess it's a good thing that my mind has become more relaxed."

Although he said that in carefree way, Kyle was smiling wryly, thinking *“so this was because of my former optimistic personality, huh”*.

"Anyway, your soul is stronger and your mana is rising as well. I dare say that in the future, you'll probably reach a point where you'll even be able to use high grade magic, although it doesn't seem like you'd be able to master that in your current state."

"High grade magic?"

Kyle instinctively leaned forward.

High grade magic was said to be able to create cataclysms. All the people who could use it had marked their name in history.

"Could it be that... I'll also be able to use the attack spells of the『 Magic king』?"

"Mhm, while those high grade attack spells were the real me's specialty, it's not impossible for other people to use them."

There were various legends about Sildonia Zares, one of them was that she had destroyed an army of 1000 demons all by herself. What allowed her to achieve such a feat was a legendary magic which had been out of use ever since her death, more than a thousand years in the past.

"You say I'll be able to use that..."

"That's a story for the future. To me it looks like it's gonna take some time for your souls to fuse perfectly, and whether you'll be able to master the spells or not is another story, and it would likely take years for you to do so."

"I see, but you've given me some good news. This means I'll be able to become stronger. By the way, besides that, are there gonna be any other changes or negative effects on my body?"

"Well, there are no precedents for what happened to you, so I can only make conjectures, but if you're fine with that, then I have a lot to say. However, do you really want me to give you such bad and vague information?"

"... No, don't."

"Smart choice. Though there is still a possibility that the essence of your soul will be altered and you'll turn into a being on a different league, the chances of that happening are extremely low anyway, but...."

"I said don't tell me!"

"Well, if anything abnormal happens to you, don't hesitate to tell me. I'll do a consultation for you, but who knows if I'll be of any help."

Said Sildonia, while laughing out loud.

After that, the discussion continued for a while, and when the sun was about to set, Sildonia put an end to the conversation.

"That's it for today. Now, let's go out."

"The food they sell in the stalls at this time of the day has got to be delicious too." said Sildonia, delightedly.

"Good grief" As he thought that, Kyle prepared to go out, but at that moment, Seran came back while violently opening the door.

"What's wrong? You look like you're in a bad mood."

"Damn it all! Whoever said that the women in this city are very open-minded was a damn hack! I wasn't even being selective, I was calling out to them indiscriminately, and yet I didn't ensnare a single one. Every one of them just looked at me with dead eyes! Their hearts must be freaking rotten!"

He had apparently failed to flirt with anyone.

"I'm pretty sure your heart is the one that's the most rotten. But you stopped quite fast today, usually you're more persistent, did you really give up?"

"They were about to call the guards. This is the royal capital, so the public order is pointlessly well maintained. Besides, as I expected, the city's women are no good, they're too disgraceful. I'd be much better matched with some more purehearted women."

"You'll quickly find out that there is no way that's gonna happen unless you change your attitude."

From Seran's face, it looked he had come to a realization at that moment, and he then started thinking with an earnest expression.

"No, wait, we have money now. If I shower them with gold then..."

"You say the worst things with the most honest of faces."

"Alright, I'm pumped up! Give me some pocket money so I can try this out!"

Seran stretched his hand towards Kyle.

"... Don't go wasting them."

Even though he was thinking that this was pointless, Kyle still gave Seran some advice, just in case, while handing him a number of Zares gold coins.

"Don't worry! Those coins are safe in my pockets! Now excuse me, the night streets are waiting for me!"

Full of a baseless self-confidence, Seran started running out of the hotel.

"He sure is a slave to his desires... Well, people like that live surprisingly long lives."

Said Sildonia, while looking at Seran's back as he left.

"Well, this will probably serve as a good experience for him."

The next morning, after finishing their preparations for departure, Lize and Ulza came to Kyle and the others' room.

"Yup, as I thought, the royal capital is amazing. Yesterday was really fun."

Said Lize in a good mood, having likely been able to see a variety of unusual things.

"It was also quite refreshing to look around the city with someone else for once... By the way..."

Ulza looked towards one of the room's beds.

"What's with him?"

She pointed at Seran, who was rolled up in ball on top of that bed with his back turned towards her. She wasn't able to help her eyes from catching that sight.

"Hmm, let's see. He was tricked by a girl who claimed her mother had some sickness and then his gold was taken by her, on top of that, he went to the house of a girl that got friendly with him, only to end up being conned through a badger game scheme... In total, he was deceived four or five times in one night, and it seems like he lost a bit of his faith in humanity."

Sildonia explained while drinking tea.

"That will teach him. Now then, we'll put him aside and talk about something

important instead, such as what we're going to do after this. Our next destination will be the town of Archen."

The Archen town that Kyle was speaking of was located along the east border of the Jirgus country, it was a large town which thrived on trading.

"To be honest, while I do have a goal, I don't have a clear guideline to follow for my future actions. As for why we're going there... Well, actually, Sildonia seems to have some sort of foresight ability."

"Huh? ...Ah! Yes, that, that's right. I do have that ability, no problem here, mhm."

Recalling the setting that she and Kyle had settled on the day before, Sildonia hastily confirmed his words.

"What's with that reaction..."

"That's just your imagination. And although I said she had a "foresight" ability, it rather seems to be a form of astrology so advanced that it can make some pretty accurate predictions, and this is a claim of the legendary 『Magic king』, so I think it's credible."

Said Kyle, making up a story that was quite plausible.

"I told her about my goal and had her use her foresight, and it seems like we need to go to this town. I'm personally willing to have faith in her prediction."

"So, what will you do?" Kyle asked Ulza and Lize.

"Well, I planned to accompany you from the get go so I don't have any objection in particular."

"Same for me, I didn't have any goal on this journey from the start, so it doesn't particularly matter which direction we take."

Seran, who had his back turned towards the three of them, also waved his hand in agreement. He had apparently been listening to some extent.

"Then, let's head to Archen."

Two nights after leaving the royal capital Marad, Kyle and the others were now in a post town. If everything went well, they would likely arrive at the town of Archen the next day.

This was a large post town, with a highway that was suitable for the transportation of trading goods from other countries. There were many inns but for security reasons, the group had gone to the most expensive one.

【"Ahh, that hot bath was great."】

After taking a bath, Lize returned to the women's room.

【"I've gotten used to camping outside, but as you'd expect, nothing beats sleeping in a bed."】(Lize)

【"True..."】(Urza)

Urza's mind was elsewhere. She was relaxing on a couch that she had placed in front of a window, while gazing at the full moon up in the night sky. For spirit users, there was a deep meaning behind the moon, and that was especially true for elves. They considered the nights of full moon to be the greatest time for them to receive the divine protection of the spirit deity Moona, who was the goddess of the moon who as well as the guardian deity of the elves.

Thus, bathing in the light of the full moon was quite enjoyable for elves. Since Lize was aware of that and knew that it would be pointless to say anything right now, she simply lay down on her bed.

【"Well then, I'll go to sleep now. Urza, don't stay up too late, okay?"】

Immediately after that, Urza's ears could hear the well-regulated breathing of Lize, who had already fallen asleep.

"That was so fast" Thought Urza, with a small wry smile on her face, as she kept on watching the moon.

【".... I don't usually drink, but at times like this, I just can't help myself from wanting to have a little alcohol..."】

As she drank a little grape wine from the cup that she had placed beside her, a tinge of red began appearing on her cheeks.

Before long, she started being sleepy. While she was thinking that it would be fine to sleep on the couch since it was not cold in the room, her eyes were slowly closing.

(Ahh.... Spirit deity Moona... Please offer us your diving protection on this journey-.....)

【"Wait, what am I doing—! I forgot about that!"】
【"Urza, shush."】

Said Lize, who was half-asleep, with an irritated voice.

【"Ah, sorry.. Wait, more importantly, I can't let this go!"】

Urza rushed out and headed towards the room next to hers.

【"Kyle!"】

She barged into the room without knocking, but all she found were two empty beds.

【"Damn it... Seran probably went out to enjoy the nightlife or something but... where is Kyle?"】

Seeing that his sword wasn't there, Urza guessed that he was likely training again, so she hurriedly went out to search for him.

Meanwhile, Kyle was sprawled on the ground, a little way from the post town, in a prairie that was devoid of people.

From his irregular breathing and his excessive sweating, it could be seen that he had been practicing for a long while, and had stopped just a short time earlier. Sildonia, who had been watching his training from the side, spoke up in admiration.

【"Mhm, correct me if I'm wrong, but you were fighting against illusions just now, right? Very interesting. We didn't have such a technique in my time. Just like a lot of things were lost to time, a lot of new things have appeared as well... As I thought, humanity is still going strong. "】

【"It's just a simulation so it's not as good as an actual fight... But there is still some value to it..."】

Kyle answered while still out of breath.

Although those were just illusions, he had fought over a hundred demons, so it was not strange for him to be in such a state.

【"My physical strength has gone up a little, but I still have a long way to go."】

His body was gradually becoming sharper, and he was now able to move it like he wanted, but his base physical strength was still insufficient.

However, it had not even been a month since he had started his full-scale training, so this was only natural.

He wanted to come up with a new combat technique that he could combine with his magic, but it seemed like that was still beyond his reach.

【"I'm too worn-out... let's hurry and go back so I can get some sleep."】

Kyle forced his body to stand up. That was because he felt like he would fall asleep on the spot if he kept lying on the ground.

【"Right, anything more than this will put too much burden on your body. Also, you need to get some rest."】

【"Still, this sword sure is great for fighting, just like it was back then."】

Kyle was impressed as he looked at the sword which he had become familiar with to the point where it felt like an extension of his hand.

【"Of course it's great. This sword body of mine is the crystallization of Zares' magic technology, this is the greatest creation ever achieved by human hands. Well, no matter what, it was made to serve as my dwelling after all, so it's only natural for it to be this great, right?"】

Said Sildonia while puffing her chest with pride.

【"It's amazingly sharp, too. I've seen quite a few mithril swords like this before, but none of them was this sharp."】

【"Well, that's because my sword body is not made of mithril, it's actually made of— "】

At the instant when Sildonia was about to finish her sentence, someone intruded on the conversation.

【"Found you! So that's where you were!"】

Urza, whose breathing was in disorder, came in front of Kyle with a ghastly

expression on her face.

【"W, what's wrong?"】

【"Did you forget about our Paractical Contract?! We can only do it now, during the full moon."】

【"...Ah, now that you mention it..."】

"I completely forgot about that", said Kyle, while looking up at the sky.

【"You're the one who brought it up in the first place, remember?!"】

【"... Can't we just do it next month? I'm worn-out and drowsy right now."】

"I want to hurry and go to bed", he added, sleepily.

【"My true name is on the line! Don't talk about that like it's bothersome!"】

【"But it looks like you forgot about it too..."】

【"S, shut up! Anyway, I'll do the preparations now, so wait here!"】

"Seems like something troublesome is going to happen here." Saying that, Sildonia left the two others behind and quickly returned to the hotel.

(Even so, I never thought I'd end up doing this ceremony with a human partner...)

While writing a magic formation on the ground in the spirit language, Urza once again wondered "Why did things come to this?".

While it was possible to impose an unbreakable promise on a partner with this "Practical contract", one would have to make their true name known in the process, so the ritual was rarely done.

However, sometimes, when people were fine with letting the partner know their true name, when they believed their relationship would gain and become better from that information being revealed, then they would have a Practical Contract as a form of ceremony.

That ceremony was the occasion to present their real name to their partner, and to vow to stay by their side for a lifetime. In other words, a Practical contract held almost the same meaning as a marriage ceremony.

For that reason, the Practical contract was considered to be extremely romantic by adolescent girls among the elves.

And when Urza had heard of that story in her youth, she had blushed just by imagining the partner that she would share the ceremony with in the distant

future.

(And yet... To think I'd have the ceremony with a man I met only half a moon ago, although it can't be helped at this point...)

Half a month prior, such a turn of events would never even have crossed her mind, not in her wildest dreams.

However, despite this unexpected outcome, Urza was not really dissatisfied about accompanying Kyle and the others on their journey.

From the start, Urza had been journeying without any precise goal, just for the sake of broadening her knowledge, so travelling together with others was not an issue for her.

Lize was a pretty nice girl.

Be in their personalities, their races, or even their ages, Urza and her had nothing in common, but their talks were still quite nice.

Recently, it felt like a bond of friendship was forming between them, beyond their differences.

As for Sildonia, while it wasn't clear whether she was a human or something else, Urza still enjoyed conversing with her.

Due to her strong intellectual curiosity, Urza would ask her about various things when there was time to do so; on such occasions, Sildonia would display a deep intelligence that even the elders in Urza's birthplace did not possess.

But at the same time, Sildonia also had both the appearance and simple-mindedness of a little girl, therefore making her an odd yet heartwarming sight to behold.

Then there was Seran, and well, he was amusing to watch from a distance.

But, in a certain way, the most problematic member of the group was actually Kyle.

Sometimes, he interacted with Urza as if they had known each other for years. However, she did not think he was over-stepping his borders, rather, she was aware that he was keeping his actions completely under control in order not to do so.

But what occupied Urza's mind the most was the way he looked at her.

He usually interacted with her normally, yet sometimes, she would catch him watching her fixedly, but she would avert her gaze upon meeting eyes with him. Because her appearance stood out, she was often exposed to the lustful eyes of

human males, that held especially true after she started her journey.

Of course, being watched like that did not feel nice, however, if that was the problem, she could just disregard him straightway without a care, but Kyle's case was different.

Because his eyes seemed like they were looking deeper inside her; whenever he gazed at her like that, Urza would feel like he was seeing through every inch of her heart and she could not bring herself to calm down, but that was not a bad feeling.

In any case, this was her first time experiencing such a disturbance in her mind.

(... Enough, I'm thinking too much. Right now, I have to focus on the Practical contract.)

Urza felt like the more she pondered on things, the deeper she would get lost in her thoughts, so she put them on hold for the time being.

And then, at last, she finished writing the magic formation and talked to Kyle who was waiting for her.

【"Alright, the preparations are done. Kyle, stand up here and... Hey, don't fall asleep! Get up."】

【"Huh? Oh, sorry, I dozed off by accident. Still, this took you quite some time, didn't it? I thought it would be easier than that."】

【"Contracts are not simple to make! Just stand up here already, and let's start!"】

Under the light of the full moon, the ceremony began.

Urza had her eyes closed as she chanted in the spirit language, with the faint blue moonlight shining down on her. Her mysterious beauty was standing out even more than usual.

As for Kyle, who was gazing at her, he was thinking that, unlike the rest of the process, this part of the Practical contract was exactly the same as the last time he did this.

He had actually been bound by a practical contract like this one, once.

The night before the decisive battle against that demon lord, Urza had told Kyle about the ceremony, believing that perhaps that was their last chance to do it, and Kyle had accepted.

At the time, Urza was such a great spirit user that she could contract numerous

high ranked spirits, she did not need to wait for the full moon like she did now, nor did she need to use a magic formation like this one. Moreover, their vows had been to live together if they managed to return alive. They had basically exchanged wedding vows. However, in the end, they were never able to fulfill that oath. She had covered Kyle to protect him, and vanished before his eyes, only leaving a gentle, transient smile behind. Kyle was never able to forget that scene.

Before long, a soft and warm light rose from the magic formation and started enveloping the two people. Thereupon, Kyle's consciousness became slightly hazy. Although he was being affected by the same symptoms as anemia, he felt no discomfort, rather, he was feeling a pleasant floating sensation, while his whole body entered in a state of lethargy. The same thing happened to Urza, who was looking at Kyle with her eyes somewhat out of focus. And then, she started talking feverishly.

【".... In the name of the spirit deity of the great moon, Moona... I, Urza Ekses, command you.... not to misuse my true name nor to reveal it to others... Will you take this oath?"】
【"I will."】

Kyle promptly answered Urza's question, just like he did the last time. Following that, the light of the magic formation became noticeably more intense, and when Kyle was thinking that it would rise up like a pillar to the moon, it burst out and turned into small particles of light. Then, those same particles flew down like glittering, powdered snow. It was a fantastic spectacle. Afterwards, Urza let out a small sigh and lifted up her face, only to find Kyle's face right before her eyes.

【"Ah...."】

"He's looking at me with that gaze again" immediately after Urza thought that, Kyle covered her mouth with his own, without giving her time to say anything.

For an instant, just a tiny instant, Urza's body seemed to surrender itself to him, but she immediately came back to her senses.

【"W-W-W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! You bastaaard!"】

When Urza shouted, Kyle also came to his senses.

【"Huh?Ah! No, that was... I mean, you have to kiss at the end of the contract, so.... What's going on? Is that not how you're supposed to do it?"】

The last time he did the ceremony, Urza had urged him to do that.

【"T-that's just a bonus you add at the end of marriage ceremonies! The contract ends after you take the oath!!"】

【"Oh... I see, well, this was one unfortunate accident."】

For Kyle, this was something that he did on a daily basis before the recent events so it had become natural for him, but of course, that did not apply to Urza.

【"....There is a magic formation available right here, and I have a spirit stone in hand, so I'll take this opportunity to contract a new spirit."】

【"A new spirit?"】

【"I'm going to contract a Salamander. Fire spirits are brutal but I should be able to control it now... And his first command will be to burn the sex offender in front of me to nothing."】

【"Wait, what!?"】

【"That, that was my first time! Just be thankful that I'm not killing you for it!"】

【"I'm pretty sure burning me to nothing is going to kill me!"】

That day, in the dark of the late night, there was a rising fire after which a man's scream resounded in the outskirts of the post town, where this was referred to as a paranormal phenomenon for quite some time.

【"Wow, you three look really sleepy."】

The next morning, while the group was walking on the highway after having left the inn, Lize, who seemed to be the only one who had gotten enough sleep, talked to Kyle and the others, who were still drowsy.

【"It's nothing, there was just a little unfortunate accident where..."】

【"Shut up! Don't you dare talk!"】Roared out Urza, whose anger had still not subsided.

【"Also, Kyle, why does it smell like something was burnt around you?"】
【"Well, that's because there was an unfortunate misunderstanding, you see.... I mean, there is no reason."】

Under Urza's glare, Kyle kept silent.

【"Oh, by the way, wanna know why I'm sleepy?"】
【"Nobody asked you, Seran."】

Lize directly discarded Seran before he could explain what he experienced the night before.

【"Alright, I see how it is...."】
【"By the way.... Urza, now that we're done with the Practical contract, will it be okay for you to come with us after this?"】

Although Kyle's question left Urza at a loss for words for a moment, she still answered while scowling at him.

【"I-I don't have much of a choice, do I? I mean, I've yet to find out why you know my true name. I can't just let you get away with that!"】
【"Is that so... well, if you put it like that, you're certainly left with no other choice."】

Urza was about to say something in response to Kyle, who seemed a little glad about this turn of events.

【"Humph!"】

But instead, she averted her eyes from his face, and with angry footsteps, she went by the side of Lize, who was walking a little further ahead.

Kyle was going to be able to keep staying together with Urza. He was truly happy about that.

There were many reasons why he had made Urza accompany the group on the journey, such as the fact that she was a Spirit user, and that she would add to the strength of the team, but the main point was that he wanted to be together with her.

In the days when he fought against those demons, he had been side by side

with death on a daily basis. When his humanity itself was wearing down, the reason he did not fall into despair was that Urza was with him.

Although they only reached the status of lovers a month before the last battle, Urza's existence had been his sole relief in those times.

If Urza had also survived, he would have lived for her sake, just like he had vowed to, and would have shared the rest of his lifetime with her.

He had been in love with her from the bottom of his heart.

If the reunion with her had happened one or two years later, perhaps he would have been able to just be content with the fact that she was still alive, but he had unexpectedly been reunited with her after a few days only.

And following that reunion, he was once again convinced of his deep love for her.

(However...)

When his thoughts reached that point, Kyle's gaze moved towards Lize, who was walking next to Urza.

If the great invasion had not happened, he would most likely have gotten married to Lize.

Actually, in his previous life, they did have a few talks about marriage.

In the town of Limaze, they would have been able to get married and have children, and they would have had an ordinary life, they would still have been happy.

After losing Lize, that life became an empty dream, which Kyle often fantasized about. And now, that dream was not just a dream anymore, it was within his reach.

(I know I'm being dishonest with them, however....)

The truth was that he liked both of them pretty much equally. However, there was a reason for that, which was this special situation that no one else had ever experienced.

There were two women who he had been ready to share his life with, and both of them had died in front of him.

Moreover, he met and reunited with both of them almost at the same time.

"If there is anyone else who has experienced that, then I'd sure love to meet him... and then to ask him for advice" He thought.

【"... Alright, I made my mind!"】

After considering things for a while, he tightly gripped his fist with determination.

【"My mission is to prepare for the great invasion! The fate of the world is at stake, this is no time to let these sorts of things disturb my mind! My personal problems can wait!"】

Using the just cause of saving the world as his pretext, he postponed the issue for the time being. In a way, that was the worst conclusion Kyle could have reached, but regardless, he once again started walking with vigor.

【"What's with him?"】(*Seran*)

【"That's just youth for you."】(*Sildonia*)

Actually, the night before, Sildonia had seen in her real form as a sword and had seen everything that had happened. Looking at her nod her head with a know-it-all look on her face, Seran tilted his head in confusion.

Chapter 8

The town of Archen was located at the east end of Jirgus, close to the neighboring country. Thanks to that, it was able to prosper through trading goods, and to become second only to the royal capital in rank.

It was a town with a rich international character to it, foreigners and demi-humans were common sight there.

"Oh~, these crowds here are completely different from the ones in the royal capital."

Said Lize in admiration while looking at the surroundings, right after entering the town.

"So, now that we've arrived in Archen, what are we going to do?"

"Well, let me see. For starters, I guess we'll go find an inn to....."

"Hey, guys, I just heard something real interesting!"

Seran, who had started buying some sweets in the food stalls, immediately came back in a somewhat excited state.

"Something interesting?"

"Yeah, I heard that princess Milena is coming to this town today."(*Seran*)

Kyle responded quietly to Seran's delighted voice.

"....is that so?"(*Kyle*)

"What? She's the "treasure of Jirgus", you know? You should be more excited than that."

Looking at Seran who was getting into high spirits, Kyle had a complicated expression on his face.

"Whatever man, we have a chance to get a look at her right now. I don't care what you say, she's the Treasure of Jirgus! I wanna see her at least once. I've already heard where she'll be coming so I'm going."(*Seran*)

Seran started walking directly after saying that.

"So are you going to see her, too, Kyle?"

Though Lize's voice sounded like she was interrogating him, Kyle pretended not to notice that.

"..Well, she's worth taking a look, right? After all, Jirgus is our country, I'd like to see the face of the future queen if there is a chance."

"Plus there is something I'd like to confirm" Thought Kyle in his mind.

"...I guess that's right, let's go then."

Since Urza and the others did not seem to have any objection either, the whole group ended up going together.

"Did we make it? If they followed their schedule, we should be just barely on time."

Murmured Kyle, while following Seran who had taken the lead. The mother of earth, Kylis, was the chief god of Jirgus' state religion, so most towns had a temple dedicated to her. Moreover, those temples often established annex institutions made to take care of orphaned children. That also applied to the one in Archen, and that was where the princess was coming for her visit. When the group arrived at the temple, a large number of curious onlookers had already come, making the place considerably crowded. However, Seran did not hesitate to thrust forward towards a gathering of children.

"Out of the way, brats! You're ten years too young to be interested in beauties!"

He forced his way forward while mercilessly pushing aside and scattering the children.

"Ah, sorry about that. Here, have some sweets."

Without a second of delay, Kyle, who was right behind Seran, took the sweets that he had bought for Sildonia and distributed them to the children. The children who were about to cry immediately started to smile, as if nothing had happened.

"Being shameless sure has its perks sometimes..."(Lize)

"But I really don't want to follow his example..."(*Urza*)

"My sweets..."(*Sildonia*)

Although Urza and Lize also followed after Seran, they still felt a little embarrassed.

When the group reached the front line of the crowd, they found the town's guards blocking the way, in order to stop people from coming any closer. Among them, there were knights who were wearing full sets of silver plate armor that had a simplified representation of a dragon on a crest around their chest area. They clearly stood out compared to the guards.

That dragon crest was the symbol of the knights of Jirgus' royal guard.

There were only around 500 knights in total in the royal guard of Jirgus, that was a considerably small number considering that some other war commanders had armies of tens of thousands under their command, but since this unit's mission was to protect and serve the king, it was composed of the most loyal subjects of the country, picked among the elite of the elite. They were all extremely brave, and had all swore their absolute loyalty to the nation and the king. Anyone who ever aimed for the position of a knight would admire the knights of the royal guard and yearn to become one of them.

Right now, those royal guard knights were vigilantly surveying the surroundings, without a single hint of negligence.

But that was only natural since someone whose position in the country was second only to the king was going to come in a short time.

"Huh? The princess' supposed to be guarded by the fifth knight corps, right? But I thought it was only composed of women..."

Said Seran, looking confused.

Traditionally, the fifth corps of Jirgus' royal guard always consisted of female knights only. They were popular among the masses due to their beauty and elegance, and they were the subject of many operas.

Recently, they were assigned under the direct command of princess Milena, and they were given the role of escorting her whenever she went out of the royal capital. The princess being followed by the corps composed exclusively of young women was a very picturesque and famous image within the Jirgus country, and yet, right now, all the knights that were present were men.

"Apparently, the fifth corps often gets dragged into ceremonies and things like that, so I'm sure they had other things to do in the royal capital and couldn't come."

"What? That's lame. But if that's how it's gonna be, then I'll just look forward to seeing the princess."

A short while later, a large coach drove up to the orphan institution under the escort of royal guard knights, who were protecting its front and back.

While the carriage's base color was white, it was elaborately decorated with silver and gold detailing, and on its flank, there was a conspicuous crest drawn with the design of a lion on it: that was the symbol of Jirgus' royal family.

This crest was the proof that the coach belonged to the royal family and that someone of a high rank was riding it, since they were the only ones who could get in.

The coach was drawn by two eight-legged horse-like magic beasts called Sleipnirs, which were almost twice bigger than a common horse.

In the wild, Sleipnirs had a rough temperament and could not be possibly be friendly towards humans, except for the cases when they were raised from a young age, so these two specimens were likely expressly raised for someone's personal use.

The knight who seemed to have the highest authority among the present royal guard knights opened the door of the carriage.

And as a woman slowly appeared from inside, the surrounding crowd started cheering.

She had long and narrow eyes, a straight nose, pale vermilion lips, silk-like jet black hair that stretched to her waist, a lithe and delicate body, and a radiant white skin... Each of her features were first-class and together they formed a miraculous and exquisite balance.

She was wearing a light green colored dress and a silver tiara. They were the most proper things to wear for someone of the royal family, but they only served to make her even more beautiful.

Although Urza was similarly beautiful, her beauty was akin to that of a sword that was sharpened by a skillful craftsman, while this woman had the charm of gold or a jewel. She merely descended from the carriage and started slowly walking, but the viewers were already entranced by every single one of her

movements. This could be said to be the power of charisma; she was simply born with the ability to captivate people.

This was the “treasure of Jirgus”, the first in line for the throne, and the princess of the Jirgus royal family, Milena.

"Mhm, the rumors weren't lying, she's beautiful. But above all, those are amazing, aren't they..."

Looking at the pair of hefty mounds that were apparent from the top of the princess' dress, which had a slightly low neckline, Seran sighed in admiration.

"...Compared to these, the difference in power is too overwhelming. Talk about comparing dragons to lizards."

While comparing those mounds to the gentle slope around Lize's chest area, Seran let out a sigh of grief.

Immediately after, the bottom of Lize's palm landed a clean hit on his shin.

"I, I was just being honest, why would you...."

"Being honest isn't always right, okay?!"

Lize shouted at Seran who was cowering.

"You guys, be quiet already."

Kyle sighed, he didn't want to stand out too much at the moment.

Kyle was also very interested in seeing princess Milena for the first time, but it wasn't on her that his eyes were stuck, rather, it was on a single knight who was following right behind her.

He was a man in his thirties with a good figure, the color of his mantle was different from the other knights and the design on his crest was slightly more elaborate than theirs, anyone could tell that that crest was the symbol of a knight leader.

He looked dauntless and gave the impression that he was constantly ready for action, making the atmosphere around him clearly different from the other knights.

"Zentos...."

Said Kyle with a nostalgic tone in his voice.

That man was a knight who was well-known not only in Jirgus but also in the

neighboring countries, his name was Zentos Ordiy, and he was the leader of the second corps of the royal guard's knights.

Given that Kyle was watching him fixedly, and given that Zentos was vigilant and wary of his surroundings, their eyes did meet for an instant.

But, of course, Zentos stopped looking at him immediately after. As for Kyle, he kept on watching him while feeling a little lonely.

In front of the orphan institution, the children were standing in line to greet the princess. Among them, there was a girl of about ten years old who ran up to the princess while holding flowers.

However, probably because she was too nervous, she fell down on the way.

The princess approached the girl who became teary eyed, and while brushing the dirt off her knees, she asked her with a gentle voice and a smile "Are you alright?".

Thanks to this, the girl lost all her nervousness, and smiled back at Milena while cheerfully answering "Yes!".

Following that, the surrounding crowd that had witnessed the scene spontaneously started a round of applause.

In response to the applause, the princess waved her hand while showing yet another kind smile.

Even in small countries, there were seldom any opportunities for the royal family to come in such close contact with the citizens, let alone in a large country like Jirgus. At best, they would just wave their hand from the palace's balcony during big festivals and the like.

However, princess Milena had teared those established customs apart and was continuously and assertively getting involved with the citizens all over the country; she was willing to participate in the country's public events and small ceremonies, and whenever there was a disaster or calamity, she would go to personally offer her condolences.

Therefore, she received tremendous support from the country's people.

This time around, the princess had been participating in a festival that was held in another town and she dropped by Archen on her way back, however, it seemed like this visit to the institution was not planned at first. The princess' schedule had actually been forcibly changed at her own urging to make room for this visit, that was what Kyle was able to hear from the onlookers

surrounding him.

The princess continued to smile as she entered the orphan institution together with the children, while keeping her elegant conduct until the very end.

Having reached their goal of taking a look at the princess, Kyle and the others separated from the crowd and went to find a place to stay for the day.

"Damn, that was a feast for the eyes. Who'd have thought that we'd get to see the princess here."

Said Seran, in a good mood.

"She certainly was amazingly beautiful. Especially "those"... they're really unbelievable..."

Lize recalled the chest of the princess who seemed to be around the same age as her, and tried to compare it to her own, but since that seemed to be futile, she soon resigned herself.

"She's the potential next ruler of the country, right? Could it be that that position requires one to have "those"?"

Although Urza was not familiar with the human monarchical system, it seemed like she could sense a certain something from the princess which she could not sense from other people.

While the three others were walking and talking about the princess they had just seen, Kyle was a little behind them and was deep in his thoughts.

Sildonia, who was by his side, talked to him in a quiet voice.

"So, was that the princess you told me about?"

"Yeah, no doubt, that was princess Milena, and shes supposed to die at the age of 16, two days from now."

Said Kyle while looking back at the orphan institution behind him.



Afterwards, Kyle and others took lodging in an inn. At the moment, Kyle and Sildonia were the only ones present in the room, since the other three had went out to stroll and do some shopping.

"So, how is she going to pass away?"

Asked Sildonia while sitting on a bed and eating sweets.

"From what I heard, in the morning of the day after tomorrow, princess Milena's group is supposed to get attacked by a magic beast on the way towards the Sanes village. That magic beast is a hydra."

The hydra was a powerful beast with a reptile's body and numerous snake-like heads, it was said to match a dragon in strength. There was a story that a hydra once attacked and destroyed a small town in a day.

In the first place, the big forest right next to Archen was the home of many monsters, and they would sometimes injure the people who took the highway. And about a month prior to this, a village close to the town had been attacked by a hydra.

According to the rumors Kyle had heard on the way to Archen, that village had suffered some serious damage, and although a punitive force had apparently been dispatched to deal with the beast, they weren't able to eliminate it in the end.

"The Sanes village is the one that was attacked by that beast, and it seems like, during her visit to Archen, the princess heard about everything that happened and therefore wished to go there for a visit of sympathy. Zentos, who was part of her escort, opposed her decision, but the princess did not give up. So, two days later, before the sunrise, she slipped out of Archen accompanied only by her small, personal troops which were given to her by the royal family, and that's when her group was attacked by the hydra. From what I heard, when the second knight corps realized the princess' absence, they rushed to find her, but it was already too late. "】

If the fifth knight corps had been there, the princess would likely not have been able to slip out since they were used to her, and even if she did go out, there is no doubt that they would have put their everything into escorting her. However, even though the fifth knight corps was under the direct command of the princess, they had been called back to the royal capital this time. In Kyle's previous life, this calamity was said to have been brought by the kindness, the compassion and the misfortune of the princess.

"Personally, I'd say she got what was coming for her."

Even though her surroundings had tried to keep her away from the danger, she just did things at her own convenience, and died while dragging her people together with her. She had involved others for her own selfish goals and they had died for it.

"I see... By the way, isn't there some other side to this story? Could this not have been something like an assassination aimed at the princess?"

"That's a natural suspicion to have. After the princess' death, there were tons of rumors all around the country."

Following the sudden death of the princess, various plausible rumors were shared in whispers between the masses, such as her death being related to demons or being caused by the secret ploys of enemy nations.

But the most plausible rumor was that the princess was assassinated by her older, half-brother, who was lower in line than Milena for the succession of the crown because he was born of a concubine.

It was only natural for him to be suspected since he was reputed for being a mediocre prince who didn't stand out much when compared to the princess, and he was the one who stood to gain the most from her death.

"The most suspicious person in this affair, prince Carenas, is actually in this very town."

"Really? But nobody's talking about it."

"Yeah, apparently he's secluded himself in an inn and hasn't made his presence public. But well, in the end, all of those theories were just rumors, and it was soon settled that the princess' death was just an unfortunate accident. Back then, I had some suspicions about this, so I once asked someone who had personally looked into this case, and apparently, the official version was actually true."

The man who had told kyle in his previous life about the details of this matter had been a former spy of the Jirgus country. At the current time, that man was likely still a spy on active duty.

Of course, those details were akin to a state secret so he normally wouldn't go telling others about them, but at that time, Jirgus had already been destroyed. In those days, anyone who had survived to the battles against the demons was quite capable, so it was inevitable that many of them had been involved with

big organizations and countries in the past.

But their ties to those countries and organizations were broken. And one day, after surviving to yet another battle against the demons, everyone got drunk and started sharing some stories they had not been allowed to talk about before... It had been a rather fun night for Kyle.

Thanks to that, Kyle currently had some information about where the country was going to lean, but it was difficult for him to use that because it was a double edged sword.

"He was a pretty skilled spy, and apparently, he had done some serious digging around this matter, and yet he couldn't find anything suspicious about it. Besides, I've met with prince Carenas before, and even if he does have the ambition to do this, he doesn't have the ability to actually do it."

"Honestly, that guy's completely incompetent" Said Kyle, while shrugging his shoulders.

"So, it was really just an accident? That's good... More importantly, can you beat a Hydra?"

"I've fought with a hydra once, back then, I managed to win without a hitch. Well, it only had eight heads. But the one I'm gonna face this time apparently has more than ten heads."

The number of a hydra's heads would increase as it grew older, and its body and strength would evolve proportionally to that. A hydra with more than ten heads would be more powerful than an inferior, low-rank dragon.

"In my current state, I'm sure gonna have a hard time fighting one with more than ten heads, but I'm prepared to do it. Besides, I'm not going to fight it alone. All the others will be together with me at that time, right?"

"We'll manage somehow" Added Kyle.

"Mmh, that's right. Given your current power, fighting a hydra with more than ten heads would be problematic. But well, I'm sure you won't have to face that kind of situation before a very long time."

"...Did you really have to say that?"

Because her words gave him a bad feeling, Kyle stopped Sildonia from talking. When he decided to become a hero, the first thing that came to his mind was

the death of this princess.

She was the “treasure of Jirgus”, when she died, the whole country was in mourning. If Kyle could appear dashing and save her life, then that would make a good start for him as a hero.

If he was really thinking of the princess’ safety, then he would just warn the knights of the royal guard beforehand about the fact that she was going to slip out and go towards the Sanes village. However, even if he warned them, he did not know if they would believe him, rather, it was much more likely that he would end up being detained for acting suspiciously.

Besides, doing that would be meaningless.

Kyle wanted to rescue the princess at the very last moment after the attack, but it would be pointless to save her if she wasn’t in a real life-or-death situation. So, even if there were going to be some victims in the process, he had no other choice.

"Sorry but I’m going to use you."Muttered Kyle bitterly while looking back at the orphan institution that the princess had probably yet to leave. Then, he drove those feelings of guilt away to a corner of his mind.

"Now then, the main problem is, how am I gonna make the rescue seem like a natural coincidence?"

Kyle pondered while sitting cross-legged on the bed.

"Can’t we just tail the princess and her troops after their departure?"

“It should be easy since she’ll be departing from right here.” Said Sildonia. This inn was the best in Archen, so the princess’ group was naturally staying here, too.

Kyle’s group was staying at the second floor, but they couldn’t even get near the stairs of the fifth and fourth floor because they were both booked by the princess and her people.

"Sure, we could do that, but if possible, I’d rather avoid being too direct."

Kyle had a bitter face as he considered the possibility of being found out after tailing the princess.

So far, Kyle had kept his investigation of the princess’ actions to a bare minimum.

The detailed schedule of the members of the royal family was a state secret, the public wasn't even told about how long the princess was going to stay in Archen.

It was very difficult to investigate those things, and of course, it was a crime. Even if the princess were to be saved by him, Kyle would still be investigated by the country later on to find out why he was on site in the first place, and it was going to be quite troublesome if the fact that he had kept track of the princess was exposed at that time.

"Still, I don't know exactly where the Hydra's attack is gonna take place, it doesn't seem like we'll be able to ambush it... It just can't be helped, I guess we're gonna follow behind the princess after she departs."

While Kyle was thinking that there was no way around this, Seran, who had gone outside, came back to the room.

"Damn it, I've been asking around about the princess' schedule but I couldn't find anything."

"...You're investigating the princess? What for?"

"No no, I just want to try to have a fated meeting with her. I want to magnificently help her after she falls into some critical situation, that way, we'll fall in love despite our difference in status and we'll.... Wait, what's with you? Why are you holding your head?"

"No, it's just that.... I just realized that we're doing the same thing and it feels pretty awful..."

Their goals were different but their actions were the same.

"The same thing? What do you mean?"

"... Well, it seems like the princess is actually going to fall into a dangerous situation pretty soon."

"What!? You're saying that the reason we came to this town had something to do with the princess?"

"Yeah, and so..."

"Alright! Leave it to me! We're basically going to follow behind the princess, right? That's my specialty!"

As he said that, Seran was brimming with confidence.

Chapter 9

Two days later, in the morning, when the light of the sun finally started appearing in the sky from the east, Kyle and his companions were outside the outer wall which surrounded Archen.

In towns surrounded by a defensive wall like Archen, the main gate would usually be locked from sunset until around sunrise, to stop people from coming and going as they wished. Therefore, the group left Archen a day prior and set camp outside the wall, taking turns and alternating between napping and waiting on standby by the side of the gate while staying in hiding.

"So, how are we going to tail her? Wouldn't it be bad if we get too close to her?"

"Plus the other side's going to be constantly on the alert, aren't they?" Said Lize.

"Mhm, this is where one of my abilities is going to come into play."

As she said that, Sildonia's body turned into particles of light and changed shape.

When the light subsided, an imposing hawk had appeared.

"Huh? Wha, What just happened?"

Lize raised her voice in surprise.

"My actual body is the sword's jewel, my human body is just something I made from mana. Therefore, it's no trouble for me to change its shape as I wish."

Said Sildonia loudly in her Hawk form, to the three astonished friends.

"On top of that..." As she said that, Sildonia flapped her wings and flew high up in the sky.

A short while later, an aerial view from very high above the ground appeared on the sword's jewel.

『This way, I can project everything that this body sees.』

The proud voice of Sildonia could be heard from the Jewel.
Urza, Lize and Seran were once again struck with admiration.

"That's amazing, depending on how you use it, this can be more useful than having a strong weapon."

"Yes, it's really convenient."

"I'm so jealous, you can peep on people as much as you want with that."

There were some magic tools that could similarly project a distant view, but they could only see fixed locations; being able to project images while in movement and in such detail was out of common sense.

In his previous life, thanks to this ability, Kyle was able to get a very clear understanding of his enemies' battle formations, which had been a great help. Now that he was able observe the princess and her troupe with this, he could rush to their aid at the ideal timing if anything were to happen to them.

"Now we can follow them without any problem."

"Yeah, the only problem left now is, just what in the world is that danger that they're going to face?"

"I wanna try to look good when I save her. Then, if things go well..."

"Guys, we're gonna be tailing the princess now so keep it down."

Although Kyle gave the three of them a warning because they kept talking, in his mind, he was actually feeling grateful towards them.

Putting Seran aside, but Lize and Urza had both believed in Kyle when he told them "I don't know why, but apparently the princess is gonna slip out of town early in the morning and is going to end up facing some kind of danger, so let's go help her", even though his explanation was really suspicious.

The same applied for Sildonia, even though she was collaborating with him on this, he was still thankful that she came along with him.

Truth be told, Kyle felt like he was too spoiled by Lize and Seran. He was confident that they would both always have his back, no matter how absurd or unreasonable his actions were.

But, conversely, if Lize and Seran were to ever tell him "Please lend me a hand but don't ask anything.", he would be more than willing to help them.

He was proud of that relationship of mutual trust.

But for that reason, he was feeling sorry for Urza.

She had no obligation to accompany him, yet she still came along together with the group, despite seeming to be quite sleepy.

(Once we're done with this, I'll take her to that famous sweets parlor in the royal capital.)

Said Kyle in his mind, knowing that Urza surprisingly had a sweet tooth. At that moment, Sildonia's voice came from the sword's jewel.

『I found the carriage.』

Most of the highways in the human tribes' areas of the continent had been built in the era of the ancient magic kingdom Zares and had been in use for more than a thousand years.

On the projected image, it was on one of those wide highways that a splendid coach, with the royal family's crest on it, was riding.

『There are only about ten people escorting the coach. But they're not the royal guard's knights from yesterday. Maybe they're the town's guards?』

Just like Sildonia had described, the projected image showed around 10 people escorting the carriage, and they seemed to be part of Archen's town guards.

"As I thought, the royal guard's knights really aren't there huh...."

Although the town guards had likely received a training fitting for their job, a Hydra would probably be too much for them to handle.

They wouldn't be a burden but it would still be better to get them to focus entirely on protecting the carriage.

Kyle took out a map and confirmed that this highway was a straight road towards the Sanes villlage.

So far, everything had gone as he expected. All that was left to do now was to immediately rush to the troupe's aid as soon as the Hydra would appear. While waiting for that time to come, Kyle and the others kept on following the princess while keeping enough distance between them and the carriage in order not to be noticed.

Much later in the day, after the group had covered around half of the distance between Archen and the Sanes village, it happened.

『Oh, something strange happened.』

"What's the matter? Did the magic beast finally come out?"

Kyle asked in curiosity.

『No, that doesn't seem to be it... The man who was driving the coach suddenly stopped the horses just now and started attacking the surrounding guards.』

"And you call that just "Strange"?!"

Seran retorted.

Kyle also felt the same way, but his body moved faster than his thoughts and he started running at full speed.

He did not take that long to reach the place, but when the coach came into his sight, most of the guards had already been slain.

There seemed to be only a single guard left alive, and even though he showed his intention to surrender, he was still mercilessly stabbed.

There were two men left standing there. One of them looked like a coachman while the other looked like a servant. Both of them were holding swords, and judging from the opened door of the carriage, it seemed like the attendant had come out from inside.

Without a chant, Kyle cast a Haste spell on himself and dashed forward to the coachman, who had his back turned towards him.

He was glad that he had worn a leather armor which did not make noise and did not hinder his movements.

Upon seeing Kyle, the other man tried to warn his companion but he was too slow.

Kyle unsheathed his sword and swung it downward at the coachman's right arm with which he was holding his weapon.

Since Kyle had used the flat of the sword, the man's arm was not cut off, but it seemed like his bones were completely broken. With a painful groan, the coachman dropped his sword.

Adding to that, Kyle drove a sharp kick to the side of the man's abdomen.

The coachman's body was blown off and started rolling on the ground while raising a cloud of dust. As Kyle thought "Is he finally done rolling?", the man stopped moving.

Thus, having neutralized the first man, Kyle turned towards the second one. Although he was shaken by the sudden intruder who had knocked down his companion, the man, who appeared to be a servant, still managed to pull himself together and to turn his sword towards Kyle.

"Kyle!"

Seran's voice came from behind. That voice did not have the slightest hint of tension to it.

"Leave the princess to me!"

With a thumbs-up, Seran slipped by the side of Kyle and the other man, and ran at full-speed towards the carriage.

In turn, the man tried to chase after him, however...

"Sorry, that's not gonna happen, I'm afraid can't let you go there."

As Kyle slashed at him, the man used his sword to receive the attack with a click of his tongue.

"You two, go with Seran. I'll join you directly once I'm done with this guy."

Said Kyle to the two who came a little after him and Seran, while keeping his eyes on the man in front of him.

Urza was about to say something, but after seeing Lize go directly to the carriage, she hesitated for a short time and then ran towards the same direction.

"Now then... It's been a while since I last had a real life-or-death fight, hasn't it?"

Although this was a fight against an unexpected opponent, Kyle had a composed and fearless smile as he slashed his sword forward.

After several exchanges of sword blows, the resistance that Kyle was faced with was different than what he had expected.

The opponent's movements were backed by a proper training, and it was clear that he had experienced many real fights in his life. He was skilled enough to be able to fight to some extent against Kyle.

"Who are you? Why are you doing this?"

Asked Kyle, without expecting an answer.

"....."

And just like Kyle thought, the man, who appeared to be an attendant, remained silent.

"That's princess Milena's coach. Can I assume that you're going against the princess? Cause if so, you've basically already failed since you're having so much trouble handling some unexpected intruder like me."

Kyle asked that question in order to agitate the man. However, the man remained silent all the same, yet Kyle could clearly feel that he was getting impatient.

This man probably wanted to quickly get rid of Kyle and to then dispose of the three remaining people.

But from this exchange of sword blows, it should have become clear to him that this intruder, Kyle, was stronger than he expected, and stronger than him. As the man wondered whether he should hold his ground or run away, his hesitation was displayed on his face.

Furthermore, Kyle did not overlook that hesitation, and accordingly, he purposely showed a gap in his defense.

Although this was a blatant lure, the man, who was in a hurry, delivered a large and powerful blow in order to bring the combat to its end in one stroke.

Kyle dodged that attack so barely that it grazed his hair.

Having dodged the attack without losing his stance, Kyle slashed his sword at the man, who could not use his sword to defend himself anymore.

"Ah!"

The man's sword wrist flew up while rotating in the air. As the man reflexively pressed on his wound, Kyle drew even closer to him and made him pass out by hitting his head with the handle of his sword. He then quickly tied him up with a rope and did some simple first aid to stop his bleeding.

『You're pretty good at this.』

"Well, that's just experience."

In the days when Kyle was battling the demons, having to perform first aid on hand injuries like this one had been an everyday occurrence for him.

"Well then, this much should be enough for now. There are some things I want to ask from these guys."

This could have been much more simple if he had simply killed them, but he wanted to capture them alive if possible in order to make them explain this situation.

Just who were these two people and what was their purpose? And what was going on with princess Milenia? Kyle wondered.

When he turned towards the carriage to confirm the state of said princess, Urza came back.

"Is it over?"

"Yeah, but putting that aside, is the princess safe? “】

"Well, about that, she's alright, she's in the carriage right now and she doesn't have any injuries, however....."

At that exact moment, Kyle and Urza heard faint noise that was accompanied by a slight vibration.

Looking at the forest where the sound was coming from, there were birds flying away all at once while trees were falling down.

"This sound is..."

『Mhm, your guess is probably right.』

Said Sildonia, with her voice coming from the gem.

Kyle quickly analyzed the current situation and searched for the best course of action to take.

He first thought about escaping from this place, however, if he did that, he would not be able to interrogate the two enemies he had captured, and he would also be abandoning the fallen guards' bodies.

Besides, the group would probably not be able to run away by running normally, realized Kyle as he kept thinking fast.

More importantly, in order to escape together with the princess, he would have no other choice than to use her carriage, however...

"Damn, the carriage's reins have been cut off. It's gonna take some time to fix

them."(*Seran*)

At that instant, Seran's voice came from the carriage; Kyle didn't know if he should call that a very good or a very bad timing.

Nevertheless, upon hearing that, he steeled himself and gave an instruction.

"The three of you, watch the carriage!"

The priority at the moment was the princess' safety. If something happened to her, the whole operation would become pointless.

In addition, the assassins might have had other companions who were still aiming for the princess' life.

"But, you're gonna face that thing... by yourself?"

Perhaps because she knew what was coming from the forest, Urza's complexion had turned pale.

"I can do this, trust me, I wouldn't try if it was impossible. I gave this some serious thought and judged that it was the best course of action. Anyway, I gotta go there, I'm leaving the coach to you."

".....I'll believe you, so don't die."

Saying that with a pained expression on her face, Urza headed for the coach. Kyle looked at Urza's back with a small smile, and then directed his gaze towards the forest on the side of the highway, where the noise from earlier was gradually becoming louder.

When faced with a Hydra who could mow down trees so easily, even a first rate adventurer would avoid fighting if possible.

As the creatures' heads swayed from side to side, Kyle could not tell if it had twelve or thirteen of them.

"Turns out the bad feeling I had about this was on point." He complained, while faced with a hydra that was about as big as his parents' house in Limaze.



There were several reasons why the hydra was a feared creature. First, due to its gigantic body, its attacks held an overwhelming destructive power. That was especially true when it attacked using two or more heads, it would be like fighting against multiple opponents who shared the same body.

Its toxic breath attack was also quite troublesome.

And because of the protection offered by its hard scales and thick skin, normal attacks would just bounce off of it.

However, all of those things were not really dangerous for Kyle.

No matter how strong or fast it was, it had a mere beast's intelligence, so its movements were straightforward and easy to read.

Since Kyle could predict the attacks, it was easy for him to dodge them, and given that he was used to fighting by himself against multiple opponents, he was able to manage even when the beast's heads attacked him simultaneously.

Moreover, although the Hydra's toxic breath was supposed to be its most dangerous attack, Kyle's dragon-leather armor almost completely nullified the effects of the toxins.

As for the defensive power of the beast's scales and skin, that was no issue for him either.

"Take this!"



Kyle threw his third “blizzard” magic stone. The blades of ice teared the hydra’s scales apart and the cold penetrated its body. The Hydra’s movements had clearly slowed down as it shouted in anguish, and made a desperate attack.

"Yah!"

While avoiding the attack of the beast’s huge mouth which could swallow a human whole in one bite, Kyle slashed at its head with a battle cry. Combining both the arm strength of kyle and the sharpness of Sildonia’s sword body, that slash cleanly sliced off the snake head, which was as big as a tree. This was the fourth head that was cut off so far, while, on the other hand, Kyle only had a few scratches on him; it looked like he was overwhelmingly dominating the battle.

『Mhm, you’re more at an advantage than I expected. I thought this would be a bit more of a close fight.』

Sildonia was impressed.

"Even I’m surprised. Well, I did some good preparations beforehand, and it seems like my body’s strengthening is progressing better than I thought."

He was also using self-strengthening magic, but still, he did not think he would able to fight against a Hydra upfront, this was a happy miscalculation. However...

"Still, this is becoming annoying."

Before Kyle’s eyes, at the base of the neck that he had sliced off at the very beginning of the battle, there was already a new head swaying from side to side.

Indeed, this was the most troublesome point of Hydras: their vitality and their power of regeneration.

In a short time, a hydra could heal a wound that would be fatal for other magic beasts, it could even regenerate parts of its body after losing them.

"Seriously, that regeneration is ridiculous."

Although Kyle held the advantage in the battle, the outcome had yet to be decided. That was because, in short, he was unable to kill the beast. To defeat a Hydra with such a strong power of regeneration, one would have to kill it instantly, or to keep dealing damage to it continuously in order to prevent its regeneration from catching up.

"Originally, I wanted Lize and the others to help me here but..."

Kyle's original strategy was to attract the beast's attention from the front while the others would attack it from the back, but given the situation and the fact that there could be other enemies beside the Hydra, the others could not separate themselves from the carriage.

Though he would be able to win anyway as long as he kept on dealing more and more damage, he could not afford to use up too much time since there might have been some other enemies.

Attacking the hydra with the sword certainly did deal some damage to it, but killing it instantly with one blow would be difficult.

As for the magic stones, while they were also effective, they could not kill it instantly either; on the other hand, high-class spells could indeed kill it in a single blow, but Kyle was still not able to use them as of now.

"I really should have practiced my attack magic a little bit more."

Originally, Kyle was not good with attack magic, so he used a magic support system as a weapon instead.

Due to his lacking mana, Kyle could not use anything above upper grade magic back then, so even if he used attack magic in combat, it would not have been really effective against demons. Therefore, in those days, he merely used support magic on himself and fought by using his sword only.

Now that he was not lacking mana anymore, it would be possible for him to use high grade magic, but at present, he already had his hands full with training his body, so he had yet to train his magic.

『It's no use asking for what you can't get. It's important to be able to do what you can with what you have in a fight.』

"You don't have to tell me, I already know. Rather, compared to the fights I've had so far, I'm pretty well off right now."

Saying that, Kyle took out several “explosion” attack magic stones.

"Well, no matter how strong its vitality is, it will be useless if I strike the root of its heads."

Even though a hydra's power of regeneration was very high, it could not increase the number of heads it had, and its sliced heads could not give birth to a new hydra either.

Kyle's eyes were looking at the part of the hydra's body from which its heads grew back.

The hydra itself was likely aware that that part was its weak point, because when Kyle approached it, the beast used one of its snake heads to interpose. To aim for that part, Kyle would have to slip through all of the beast's more than ten snake heads.

"...It's been a while but I guess I'll use that."

Kyle stepped back and put a great distance between himself and the magic beast. Because its regeneration would be delayed if it moved, the Hydra did not chase after Kyle and concentrated on recovering instead.

Kyle lowered his center of gravity and turned his sword horizontally in order to strike the Hydra with it.

"....'Haste'!"

He focused his entire mind on pushing the effect of his acceleration magic to the utmost limit to raise his speed for just an instant.

Since, originally, Kyle was already proficient with support magic, it was possible for him to use it with such detailed adjustments.

Having just finished regenerating its heads, the hydra started running towards Kyle.

Kyle took a deep breath, and with a loud battle cry, he stepped forward using his entire strength.

As he rushed ahead, the highway's stone paving was crushed underneath his feet. That speed was beyond the reflexes of magic beasts.

Kyle then jumped at the center of the hydra's body, which was the root of the beast's more than ten heads, and he stabbed his sword in there.

The dull sound of an impact, that seemed to come from the bottom of the

hydra's abdomen, resounded in the whole area, and the huge beast took several steps back after being pushed behind by a man that weighed one hundred times less than itself. All of its snake heads coughed up blood while shouting in pain.

Kyle had increased his speed to the very limit with his magic, and then had taken advantage of the power of the resulting charge in order to stab the enemy by using his own body's momentum; this was a simple attack.

But it was that simplicity that made it powerful, so powerful in fact that an enemy at the size of a human being would be reduced into smithereens by it. However, even when compared to the other magic beasts, the gigantic hydra's vitality was particularly great, so even this attack was not able to kill it at once.

After moving the planted sword around in order to extend the wound, Kyle instantly pulled it out and then pushed his left hand into the wound as deep as he could.

Once his whole upper arm was inside, one of the snake heads, which had recovered from the shock, rammed him from the side.

Since his arm was still stuck inside the wound, Kyle was not able to dodge as his body was shoved away by the hydra and was sent rolling on the ground.

However, Kyle immediately recovered to his feet. Although this attack would normally have broken many of his bones, it seemed like he only had a few bruises.

【Ouch... I'm glad I bought this armor."】

Once again impressed by his armor, Kyle put his sword back in its scabbard while his fighting mood left him despite the fact that the enraged and injured Hydra was coming at him.

And then, the moment the hydra's fangs reached Kyle, it blew up from inside.

"Nice, everything went well."

Kyle clenched his fist in a triumphant pose.

Had he simply hit the hydra with the 'Explosion' magic stone, it likely would not have damaged it much due to the beast's thick skin and hard scales. Therefore, he had forced two of those stones inside the hydra's body through its wound. Since the explosion had happened inside of the beast, its defense had been useless. Nearly half of its body had blown up, and that was enough to kill it.

『You won. Killing a hydra with more than ten heads one-on-one is quite a big deal. By the way, what was that last technique? It was pretty powerful.』

"I call it 'Shukushi'." (TIn: [*If you're interested*](#))

Kyle was the one who had come up with this skill in his previous life. When a certain man, who had come from an island country located across the east sea of this continent and who used a strange curved sword, saw this skill, he had yelled out "Shikushi" out of astonishment; since then, Kyle started calling it that as well.

"Well, the skill merely gives speed and strength. I need some time to focus before using it, it would not work on a true master or a demon, or rather, on anyone or anything that has some wisdom."

Moreover, when this skill wasn't entirely decisive, it would give the enemy a big opening to exploit, so there were few settings where it could actually be used.

"But I don't think I could have used this technique if my body hadn't come to be able to endure the effects of my magic. Still, I know I'm the one who did all this, but it was pretty brutal, huh."

A large amount of flesh, organs and blood was scattered all over by the explosion, it was a terrible sight.

There was also a bloody stench and an odor of burned flesh due to the explosion, making the surrounding smell just as terrible as the view.

"...They won't get mad about this, right?"

Kyle's face became stiff upon seeing the blood that had stuck on the royal family's personal coach, and the organs and flesh which had fallen on its roof. After convincing himself that this had been inevitable, Kyle approached the carriage. Thereupon, he noticed that there were corpses of hellhounds, which were magic beasts that looked like large wolves.

Given that their heads were either crushed or burned, it appeared Lize and the others were the ones who had killed them.

"So these beasts were attacking at the same time... that's pretty strange, isn't it?"

The magic beasts had their own respective territories, so it was a rare to see different types of them appear at the same time.

Especially since there was a hydra close by at that moment. And given that the creatures that had appeared were just some weak hellhounds, this situation was all the more unlikely to happen.

"Kyle! Are you okay?"

Having defeated the hellhounds, Lize and Urza came up to Kyle.

"You really killed a hydra... that's amazing."

"That's natural, a mere Hydra is not worthy of being my opponent."

Responded Kyle a little proudly after Urza expressed her surprise towards this unbelievable outcome.

"But did you really have to go about it this way?" *(Lize)*

Said Lize with an unpleased tone, while looking at the disastrous scene in the surroundings.

"...Yeah, I'm reflecting on that a little bit..." *(Kyle)*

"Also, you smell awfully bad, Kyle." *(Urza)*

Upon smelling the stench that was coming from Kyle due to the hydra's blood which had covered his body, Urza frowned.

"...Really?"

"Sorry but please don't come near us until you get that smell off of you." *(Lize)*

Urza and Lize both took a step back away from Kyle with their eyebrows frowned.

Kyle's shoulders dropped a little as he walked away from the carriage.

『... Disappointed? You wanted a bit more praise than that, didn't you?』

"Oh shut up."

While feeling slightly dispirited, Kyle took a water container and poured water over his head.

There were three women in the carriage.

One of them was princess Milena, who was wearing a white dress this time. The other two were likely the princess' maids. One of them was a girl of around ten years old and the other one was a woman who seemed to be slightly older than the princess.

All three of them were currently sleeping inside the coach.

"To think they would stay asleep in a situation like this, they're really out of this world."

Said Seran with a voice that had hints of both amazement and admiration.

"No... It looks like they all ingested sleeping drugs."

Said Urza upon examining the three women's conditions.

"Then give them some detoxification magic medicine, that should be able to cancel the effects of most drugs."

"Alright."

Following Kyle's instruction, Urza immediately took out some magic medicine and made the three women drink it.

"Ah, right, Kyle, take a look at this. I found it on the coachman's seat."

Seran showed an old, tightly closed leather bag which was engraved with magic letters.

"This... is this a monster gathering bag?"

"Yeah, and it's a strong one. Plus it wasn't sealed."

The secretions and the internal organs of some magic beasts or monsters could become materials to make magic medicine; moreover, their bones, their fangs and the like, could be used to make weapons.

Some of those materials cost tremendous amounts of money, so there were adventurers who specialized in monster hunting.

The magic beasts gathering bags were quite useful for those monster hunters as they were purposed to lure monsters by using smells that they liked.

The monster gathering bag on the coachman's seat was a particularly potent one as it could gather many monsters indiscriminately and in a wide range. It

was likely because they were lured by this that the hydra and the hellhounds had come.

"Did those guys lure the monsters to try to make them attack the princess?"

The princess had been drugged into sleep. If there was an emergency, she would not have been able to escape.

Those two men had likely been laying the groundwork for that. In the end, it turned out that princess Milena's death had not been an accident caused by a magic beast's attack, but it had actually been an assassination camouflaged as an accident.

"Also, I've already fixed the reins, so, we can at least move the carriage for now."

"I see, then..."

When the group was about to return to Archen for the sake of the princess' safety, princess Milena slowly opened her eyes.

"Oh? ...I am still alive?"

Said the princess the moment she woke up, with a somewhat surprised tone.

"I thought I would never wake up.... But it seems like my good fortune has yet to give up on me."

It seemed like she was confirming the situation to herself rather than asking about it.

After that, she finally noticed the presence of Kyle and the others, who were right in front of her.

"Are you, by any chance, the ones who saved me?"

"Yes. My name is Kyle, Kyle Leonard. In the middle of my journey, I happened to come across this place where your highness was attacked by some enemies and magic beasts, so I came to assist you together with my companions."

While bowing one knee as a gesture of courtesy, Kyle answered with a line that he had thought up beforehand.

"Thank you. I would have lost my life here if not for your help."

At that moment, the older maid also woke up and reflexively went in front of

the princess to try to protect her.

"It's fine, it seems like these people have rescued us."

Although the maid lowered her vigilance in response to the princess' words, it seemed like she was knowledgeable about magic and martial arts, and she kept looking at Kyle and the others without dropping her guard in the slightest bit. Following that, princess Milena tried to go outside but Kyle stopped her.

"I believe we're not in danger anymore."

"That's right, but it's just that, how should I say this.... the outside looks quite brutal."

Outside the carriage, there were heaps of corpses all around.

"I don't mind, I have to see it with my own eyes."

Having left the carriage, princess Milena did not raise a single eyebrow upon looking at the monster and human corpses in the perimeter. Though she seemed to be slightly taken aback when she saw the gigantic hydra which had a large hole in its body, she kept calmly observing the surroundings without being disturbed.

"I roughly understand what had happened here. We are in the middle of the road between Archen and the Sanes village, are we not?"

"Y-yes. That's right..."

Her uncanny and out of place behavior made Kyle feel perplexed.

"She gives a different impression than the other day."

"Yeah, it's like she's a completely different person."

While Lize and Urza were speaking to each other in whispers, a voice came from Sildonia, reaching only Kyle's ears.

『Kyle, there is a group of men on horseback coming from Archen. This time, they are definitely from the royal guard. 』

Sildonia's hawk body was still flying over the sky and observing the surroundings.

"Understood... Princess Milena, it seems like there are knights of the royal guard coming here from Archen."

"So they're finally here."

"We can take a break now" the moment Seran said that, a shrill voice came from the princess.

"This is not good! We must escape immediately! Not only they will kill me, they will also kill you."

"Huh? But they are the knights of the royal guard, what's the pro.... what is the issue?"

"The man behind this attempt on my life is the second commander of the royal guard's knights, Zentos."

"Huh?"

Kyle unintentionally let out a foolish sounding voice.

"No, but... what? You said.... Zentos?"

Asked Kyle in disbelief, but the princess did not reply to him and instructed her maid instead.

"Aluka! Burn the corpses in the perimeter!"

While Kyle and the others were stuck in disbelief by the order they had just heard, the older maid, who was called Aluka, did not hesitate to follow that instruction and started chanting for a spell.

"Their goal is to kill me, so they're bound to check the corpses in this place to see if mine is among them. Surely, they won't be able to do so instantly if we burn the bodies. Currently, it's necessary to buy some time, even if only a little."

As the princess said that in an indifferent yet peremptory and dignified manner, Aluka started using the fire magic "Fireball" to burn the guards' corpses.

"Ninos, accompany me to the coach, and Aluka, take the reins."

Although the younger maid, Ninos, abided by the princess' words, Aluka seemed reluctant to do so.

"But, Milena-sama, that would mean leaving your side and..."

"Steering the carriage is an important role. I also want you to watch our surroundings at the same time, therefore, you're the only one I can ask."

"....Yes."

Albeit reluctantly, Aluka went to the coachman's seat since that was inevitable.

"All of you, please hurry and get inside as well, I shall explain the situation to you."

Said princess Milena, while looking towards Kyle and the others. The group exchanged glances for only moment before deciding to board on the coach, believing that it was better to listen to the princess for the time being. Then, having seemingly been struck with an idea, Seran opened the monster gathering bag that he was holding and threw it over the hydra's corpse.

"If the point is to buy time, then we might as well get some monsters in their way. If another Hydra happens to come by, then that's even better."

Said Seran with a mischievous child's smile. After everyone got inside the coach, it once again started moving towards the Sanes village. Unlike the slow speed that the carriage was going at before, it was not going at full speed to facilitate the group's escape.

Chapter 10

On the straight highway in the middle of the large forest, the carriage was powerfully advancing forward.

Compared to ordinary horses, the sleipnir horses that were pulling this carriage were superior in strength, speed and endurance. They were pulling a large coach, but still, as long as they kept up this speed, the swift horses that were carrying the royal guard's knights would likely not be able to catch up.

Within the vehicle, Kyle and his three friends as well as the princess and her maid Ninos were sitting on opposite sides.

As one would expect from a coach of the royal family, even though it was going this fast, there was surprisingly barely any vibration and noise inside.

"First of all, I would like to thank you once again. If not for you, I would have already left this world by now."

Princess Milena deeply bowed her head.

Ninos, the maid who was next to her, seemed to be dissatisfied about her master bowing to others, but since she had also been saved, she lowered her head similarly.

Kyle and the others had already introduced themselves and explained the situation.

Well, actually, all they had said was their names, and the fact that they had only stumbled upon the princess by pure coincidence.

"Yesterday.... You said that the one who planned this attack was the commander of the royal guard's second knight corps?"

"Indeed. And the person backing him is Prince Carenas, my older, half-brother."

"...I see, so it was Prince Carenas?"

Said Kyle with a bitter tone of voice.

He had already expected that when the princess had brought up Zentos' name earlier, but upon actually hearing it from her, he had a hard time completely believing it.

"In short, this is one of those internal squabbles for the right of inheritance to

the throne?"

Asked Lize from the side.

"Yes, exactly."

"Wow...."

Lize found herself at a loss from the straightforward answer.

"About Zentos... was this really orchestrated by him? Are you sure of what you're saying?"

Kyle asked. His manner of speaking could very well be considered to be rude. However, the princess did not mind, even though Ninos, who was sitting by her side, had a bad expression on her face.

"Yes, after all, I heard it directly from my brother. After Zentos made us drink the drugs and our consciousnesses started fading away, my brother proudly gave a minutely detailed explanation about the whole matter."

First, the princess heard that a village nearby had been attacked by a hydra, therefore, she wanted to go there for a consolation visit, but the knights of the royal guard opposed her wish since the risks of being attacked by monsters on the way was too big. However, Princess Milena did not give up, and accompanied by a few of the town's guards, she secretly departed before dawn. Although the royal guard's knights hurriedly chased after her upon noticing that she had left, her group had unfortunately already been attacked by monsters, and the princess had died as well... a simple accident, that was what the prince wanted the matter to seem like.

This accident was precisely the version that Kyle knew of, but that turned out to have been planned by Carenas. Kyle was shocked, wondering just how incompetent the prince had to be in order to actually reveal himself on purpose.

"In other words, he tried to fool the nation by using the fact that your highness sometimes changes her schedule."

"Like you did when coming to Archen for example" The moment Lize said that, Seran, who had been lost in his thoughts on the way, spoke up.

"Oh, I remember now. I knew I'd seen this child somewhere. Aren't you that

little girl who tried to give flowers to the princess in Archen?"

He said, while pointing at Ninos with a shocked face.

"Oh, you were able to notice that? I believed she gave a completely different impression with her disguise."

"You have good eyes", added the princess, while feeling a little surprised.

"I noticed because she's a cute girl, and when I saw her in Archen, I was thinking that she would sure become a beautiful woman in the future."

Seran showed Ninos a big smile, but she drew back her body with a slightly disgusted facial expression.

"So, that means... she did that on purpose?"

Gently comforting a little girl after she fell down was a simple action, but it was likely to give a favorable impression to others. And since this whole interaction had been prepared in advance, that meant that the princess' visit to Archen's orphan institution had not been due to a sudden change in her schedule but had actually been planned from the very beginning.

"A plain interaction with the nation's people like that one is perfect for a publicity stunt. But in the Sanes village's case, there would not have been much merit to me going there directly. It would have sufficed to send them gifts from the royal family and to casually spread the word about that."

The princess laughed elegantly while covering her mouth. An old proverb crossed Kyle's mind, "The one thing the devils share with angels is their smile".

"Did she really just openly call it a publicity stunt?"

"I feel like I'm learning more and more than I'm supposed to know about what happens behind the government scenes..."

『Well, it's important for politicians to be popular with the people below them. 』
"...human politics sure has many sides to it."

Seran and the others, including Sildonia in her sword form, started speaking in whispers.

Of course, they were in the same carriage as Princess Milena, so she could still hear them, but she did not mind that and continued to explain.

"I knew that my brother had these kinds of ambitions. But I neglected the matter because I assessed that he would not be capable enough to put them into practice."

"Hmm... would you say he has 'difficulties' of some sort?"

"Yes, frankly speaking, he's incompetent. It's fair to say that he is a good-for-nothing who cannot fulfill his obligations as a member of the royal family."

Said Princess Milena while disregarding Kyle's considerate attempt at being careful with his words.

"However, everything changed the moment he managed to ally himself with Zentos, who is very competent and popular."

"But, was that worthless... I mean, was prince Carenas really able to get commander Zentos and the knights under him to join his side?"

The princess shook her head from side to side in response to Kyle's question.

"No, Zentos is likely the only one actually following him, along with, at most, a mere small part of the second knight corps."

"So all the other knights following him are just obeying their commander's orders?"

Said Seran in astonishment.

"Yes, I do not know if they have doubts about this matter or not, but for knights, as long as they're ordered to do something, it's plenty enough for them to go through with it."

"Can't they think for themselves a little..."

Although Seran complained to her, the princess' sole reaction was to answer him.

"No army can hold if the soldiers start acting and thinking for themselves as individuals. They are faithfully following their commander's orders, which is the right behavior for the royal guard's knights. It would have been absolutely impossible for them to be appointed as knights of the royal guard if they gave priority to their personal thoughts and feelings rather than to their superiors' orders."

"However, will they really be okay with this? We are talking about the assassination of their own country's princess after all...."

The princess responded to Kyle's question with a clear nod.

"They will. If the commander tells them that this is a secret order from my father, the king, then they'll have no other choice than to obey."

"The princess is suspected of the grave crime of betraying the country, but given her unanimous popularity with the people, this information would bring about a massive pandemonium within the nation. So we've received a secret order to deal with her and to cover her death as an accident caused by monsters." All Zentos had to do was probably only to give an explanation along those lines

If those knights were told by their commander that this was a secret order that he received directly from the king, then they certainly would have no other choice than to abide, no matter what their inner thoughts really were.

"...So, anyone chosen to become a commander of the royal guard's knights would be all the more loyal and would never be driven by their own self-interests. Given that he's the commander of the second knight corps, this should have applied to Zentos Ordiy as well, however..."

Princess Milena shook her head. It seemed like, even now, she was still not able to accept this.

"To begin with, Zentos became a military attaché under my brother's direct control in order to observe him and prevent him from doing anything foolish. And I personally had no suspicions about Zentos at all, so the moment he became my brother's ally, I had already lost. I fatally misread the situation."

Princess Milena heaved a deep sigh.

"Of course, that does not mean I had any intention to drop my vigilance, and I always tried not to let any openings in my guard for others to take advantage of. Every time I left the royal capital, I would be escorted by the fifth knight corps. Moreover, Killen, the fifth corps' commander, is a relative from my mother's side and she's also a military attaché whom I can trust and who's directly under my orders. However, due to their good-looking appearances, the corps' members are often pulled into ceremonies."

After saying that, the princess lightly put her hand over her right eye and brow, as if she was having a headache.

But she still looked like she had come out of a fine painting, even in that state of pain.

"This time, the fifth corps was called back to the capital because of the sudden visits of some state guests, and so, Zentos' second knight corps took the role of escorting me in their instead. But that was no issue since, after Killen, the person I trusted most was Zentos... Now that I think about it, I should have been suspicious about the fact that my brother came along with them even though he had no business in Archen."

Kyle shared the exact same feeling of bitterness as Princess Milena. An assassination over the succession of the throne: although this would be the most simple reason as to why the princess was targeted, Kyle did not doubt that this was a possibility.

But this was completely unexpected to him since he trusted the former spy who had told him about the details of this matter, and because, above all, he had personally met with Prince Carenas and Zentos in his previous life and knew their personalities.

Kyle's impression of them was the same as the princess', especially the part about Zentos being extremely trustworthy.

Kyle believed that Zentos would not be able to fake his behavior like that, and that he would not allow himself to do it even if he could.

(...)

After sighing deeply in his mind, Kyle put his feelings in order and started talking.

"I see, I understand the gist of the situation. The problem now is, what are we going to do about what's coming?"

"At this point... I guess there is no way they're going to just give up."

Seran said, to which Kyle answered with "Of course they won't".

"Since they failed to use the monsters to assassinate her, they'll probably think of other ways to do that. They're going to come up with something like 'the princess was abducted by a mysterious group of people, but when those kidnappers were exterminated, she had already been killed'."

"Yes, I also think so. Perhaps, 'officially', the second knight corps are currently

pursuing my kidnappers in order to rescue me."

Princess Milena agreed with Kyle.

"Kidnappers? But who would that be in their made up sto... Wait, don't tell me it's..."

Seran pointed his finger at himself with a bitter facial expression, and Kyle gave a big nod in response.

"So what then? Are we going to become, out of nowhere, some kind of villains who kidnapped a princess?"

"Yes, and we'll also be framed as the brutal murders who slaughtered those town guards."

After saying that, Kyle suddenly looked at the princess.

"I understand what you were doing. The reason you explained the situation to us in details was to prevent us from escaping."

"Yes."

The princess gave a clear answer while keeping her composure intact.

"It would be impossible for Aluka, Ninos, and I to keep escaping by ourselves up until when the fifth corps arrives tomorrow. If I may be frank with you, Kyle-sama, I can only rely on you and your friends right now."

The reason the princess had explained in details this matter that could be said to be a big scandal for the royal family was so that Kyle and the others would have an accurate understanding of the current situation.

There was no reason for prince Carenas' side to keep Kyle and his friends alive, rather, they would consider that they have to kill them no matter what in order to keep their mouths shut.

Even if the group were to abandon the princess and escape from here, the prince's people would likely figure out from the circumstances that the hydra was defeated by outsiders, and they would likely try to get those outsiders' information from the princess before killing her.

It was easy to imagine what would happen after that; if the princess ended up leaking information about Kyle and the others, her assassination would be pinned on them, and they would end up being put on the country's most

wanted list and chased after.

In order to avoid that, Kyle and his friends would have to silence the princess right here and to escape after, but they would not be able to do such a thing. In short, in order to survive, the group would have to bring the princess back to the royal capital safely so as to prove their innocence.

"All of us are already in the same boat. Therefore, let us do our best to survive together."

Perhaps because she had seen through the conflict that was occurring within Kyle, the princess showed a smile that would enchant even demons. Apparently, she not only had a sharp mind, but she was also stubborn and had a tough mentality.

"Well, from the start, abandoning you and your people was not really an option for me...."

Said Kyle while trying to convince himself that those inelegant traits of hers would make her quite reliable in a situation like this one, and while feeling a little ashamed for having such rude thoughts.

"Oh? What do you mean?"

The princess slightly tilted her head.

"I'm afraid that the coachman and servant from earlier were likely two royal guard knights in disguise. I kept them alive with the intention of interrogating them later on.... but I forgot to bring them here."

The Zentos matter had simply been that much of a shock to Kyle. However, because of this, the prince's side would now get a detailed description of Kyle's appearance, at the very least.

"well, that's all the more reason why you cannot abandon us here, isn't it?"

Said the princess with a delighted tone while matching her hands together, but Kyle only answered with a dry laugh.

"Of course, if we're able to safely return to the royal capital, then I promise to grant you a reward. If you wish to become a knight, then..."

"No, I do not want higher status nor money. If possible, I'd like you to grant me

some prestige."

"...That's quite a peculiar wish."

The day gradually slipped into the evening, and the group's carriage was smoothly advancing forward.

If no problems occurred, then they would soon arrive at the Sanes village, which was unfortunate.

"When that happens, we'll be like trapped rats."

Kyle groaned while looking at a map.

The highway that the group was currently riding on only went on as far as the Sanes village, after that point, it would become impossible to use the carriage. The enemies likely would not miss that opportunity in their assassination attempt.

"To summarize our situation: First, we have one advantage, which is that rescue will come as long as we earn enough time."

The rescue that the princess was referring to was the royal guard's fifth knight corps, which was scheduled to arrive the next day, between the morning and noon.

"If I'm not in Archen by the time they arrive, Killen and her group will immediately come towards here to search for me. Therefore, assuming that they will come to the Sanes village, I suppose we will meet with them around tomorrow evening."

"What if they're given false information in Archen about our location?"

"I don't think that's possible. In these circumstances, lying would be akin to admitting one's suspiciousness, and my brother's side cannot do that if they consider what's to come in the future. In the first place, I was supposed to be dead at this point in time."

"By now, their plans have already been disturbed." Added the princess.

"Once the fifth corps comes, our side and my brother's side will be on equal standings, so they will be in trouble if a commotion were to start."

"And that's why the prince's side is also in a hurry...."

In short, if the group could hold on until, at the latest, the next day's evening,

then they would be saved.

So, the question now was: how exactly were they going to earn time until then?

"Why don't we just keep escaping until we reach the Sanes village and then just barricade ourselves there?"

Suggested Seran, but Kyle refused.

"I'd rather we don't. They'll probably kill the whole village to silence them."

"Huh? Seriously?"

"Yeah, at this point, they won't mind doing this much. A single village would only have around one hundred or two hundred villagers, so they probably won't be concerned about silencing them all. After that, they can pin those crimes on monsters or on the brutal kidnappers who took the princess."

"What with all the plotting and silencing? These guys are so damn high-handed."

Complained Seran.

"How about running away inside the forest instead?"

Proposed Urza, who was knowledgeable about the forest.

The forest was like the elves' own garden. Escaping there would probably be possible with Urza's cooperation.

However, going through the forest would naturally mean leaving the carriage. And no matter how one looked at it, princess Milena, whose safety was the number one priority, would not be able run from place to place within the forest.

"My apologies, but my strength is only average at best. I will surely hold you back if we run away in the forest."

Adding to that, going there was very dangerous as there were many monsters living inside the forest and they were particularly active in the dark of the night.

"And if something happens there, we'll end up using fire to fight."

"Fire? ...It would certainly be bad if we start a fire inside."

Urza frowned. Such a turn of events would be unbearable for elves since the forest was their home.

"I guess we'll pick that suggestion if we run out of time or something." (Kyle)

"So, are they still chasing us?" (Urza)

Urza sighed.

Abandoning the coach at this time would be quite a blow to the group.

Of course, it was convenient for moving, but besides that, its size and weight combined together with the sleipnirs' speed could produce a great destructive power. And above all, since it was custom made for the royal family, it was considerably solid, and the vehicle itself could serve as a shield to protect the princess.

The odds were clearly not in the group's favor, but they did have this one advantage over the enemy.

『The knights did not change their direction, they are still pursing us and coming towards here. Their numbers haven't changed either, there should be about 80 of them.』

Reported Sildonia. Her hawk-shaped second body was continuing to observe the knights from the sky, which was a great help since it allowed the group to stay aware of the enemy's movements.

"This Intelligence Sword is quite convenient."

Said the princess with a tone of admiration.

An intelligence sword, as its name implied, was a sword that possessed intellect; it was a type of magical life-form.

In some extremely rare cases, they could be found in ruins that were left in ancient times, and Kyle had explained to the princess that Sildonia was a sword that had been found in one of said ancient ruins and which happened to excel in monitoring things and people.

After thinking for a while, Kyle made up his mind and spoke up.

"Although there will be some risks involved, I think we should return."

"Return? Where? Surely you're not thinking of going back to Archen, are you?"

Asked princess Milena.

"Even though this might not be the case in a single village, there are thousands of people in Archen, and I don't think it would be possible to silence

them all."

"Certainly, if we're able to go back to Archen, then we will have places to hide and our pursuers won't be able to simply do as they please, but..."

"Besides, that way, you will be able to meet up with the fifth corps earlier, Milena-sama. At worst, you'll meet them tomorrow around noon, and at best, your safety will be guaranteed by tomorrow morning."

"However, for that, it will naturally be necessary to get past the knights who are pursuing us. Do you have any good methods to do so?"

It seemed like Milena had yet to be able to agree with Kyle's explanation. Because this highway was a straight road, and if the group turned back, they would certainly end up colliding with the knights who were coming after them.

"No, it won't be necessary to get past them, nor to deceive them. We will take them from the front."

"....I am sorry, what did you say? Hmm... There are 80 of those knights coming after us, isn't that right?"

The princess' facial expression looked like she was asking "just what in the world are you blabbering about?", but she was also confused at the same time because Kyle seemed to be completely serious.

Naturally, Kyle had fully considered all of the limited options at hand, and he had deemed that this was the best choice to raise the group's chances of survival.

And, above all, something fortunate had happened, which had led Kyle to that decision.

"You're certain that Zentos isn't with them?"

Kyle asked Sildonia.

『Mhm, you mean the fellow who was walking by the side of the princess the other day, right? I've confirmed over and over again that he's not there, I have no doubt about this.』

"I see.... That's very good news."

Zentos, who was the commander of the pursuing knights, was not with them. Kyle did not know the reason for that, but in any case, that was convenient for him.

"Then our chances of success are high enough. All we have to do now is to find a place that seems good enough to set up an ambush."

With these words, he took out a magic stone and some magic medicine from one of the bags that he and his companions had been carrying on their shoulders earlier.

"Oh dear."

As she saw the large amount of magic stones, a surprised expression appeared on the princess' face, as one would expect.

There was only a single pile of magic stones, but that alone was already a considerable amount.

"Milena-sama, take some magic medicine, just to stay safe. If by any chance you happen to get injured, please drink it immediately."

The princess was familiar with what Kyle had given her, it was a top-ranked magic medicine which could even heal a deadly wound as long as the person taking it was still alive. Naturally, its price was proportionate to its effectiveness, but it could be said to be worth as much as one's own life. Although the people of the royal family would always keep some magic medicine on them for emergencies, the princess did not have any on her right now because, apparently, it had been taken from her when she was still asleep.

"....."

The princess took a second look at Kyle and his companions. Until now, she hadn't had the time to think too deeply about this, but those people had defeated two knights of the royal guard and a gigantic hydra. Besides, based on the talk they had, it seemed like the hydra had been killed in a one-on-one fight.

Furthermore, no matter how she thought about it, having such a large amount of magic medicine and magic stones seemed unlikely for some run-of-the-mill adventurers who just happened to pass by.

"You... Just who are you?"

Kyle answered the princess' question with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Who we are? Well, we're just some passersby who aspire to become

heroes."



"What's the meaning of this?! Why is this happening?!"

In one of the rooms of the inn where the princess had been staying before, there was an irritated man pacing back and forth while yelling at a knight who was standing in front of him.

That plump man who was wearing refined clothes was Carenas, the prince of the Jirgus country.

And the one standing in front of him was Zentos, the commander of the royal guards' second knight corps, who was famous as being the country's greatest knight.

Placed on a table in that room, there was a card with ancient magic letters written on it. Such cards would come as a pair that two people could use to communicate with each other even when there was great distance between them.

Those cards could be used for no more than a few times a day, and it was only possible to talk for a few dozen seconds each of those times, but they were precious and extremely convenient magic tools from the era of the ancient magic kingdom.

Through this tool, the prince had received a report from the second corps' vice commander who was chasing after princess Milena.

"There is no need to worry. We will be able to deal with the princess soon."

Said Zentos while deeply bowing his head.

"Then, why are you still here?! Go take care of that woman yourself immediately!"

"There is no problem since I've instructed the vice commander in advance about what he should do in case of a failure. Besides, your highness, in the first place, had you stayed in the royal capital and left everything to me, I would have been able to command the troops directly."

"I, I naturally have to personally ascertain that this matter is properly dealt with! It's my duty to lead that impertinent woman to her death!"

"However, in doing so, you're exposing yourself to danger, your highness.

Therefore, it is impossible for me to leave your side at the moment. The fifth corps will come back soon, and I believe that you are aware of commander Killen's stern personality, and of her loyalty to the princess."

"Uh....."

Prince Carenas found himself at a loss for words.

"The fifth corps is supposed to arrive by tomorrow, but if they come back earlier than scheduled, then commander Killen will certainly pressure your highness. In that situation, will you be able to handle her by yourself?"

"W-well, I...."

Karenas knew that that woman might even thrust her sword at royalty. And the only one who could handle and suppress her was Zentos.

"Damn it!"

The prince was becoming more and more irritated and kicked a chair that was near him.

Killing princess Milena in the royal capital would have been too conspicuous, but whenever she was outside of there, Killen's fifth corps would always stick to her. However, since they were currently separated from her, there was a long-awaited opportunity to assassinate the princess.

And now that the prince's side had taken action, failure was no longer an option.

"Moreover, this is also to prepare in case there will be suspicions about princess Milena's death. At that time, we'll be able to push the full responsibility of this on the vice commander and the knights under him, so I believe it will be more convenient for us not to be present at the location of the princess' death."

"O-oh, indeed! That is very important! In reality, I had already thought of this. I was just wondering if you would notice it or not."

Although the prince instantly turned back on his previous statement, there was one there to point that out.

"There is no way that the princess will be able to escape. She's surrounded by a large forest, her carriage can only be used on the highway, and she won't be able to run inside the forest with her dress. Adding to that, we've already closed

the highway so that there won't be anymore disturbances, therefore, no one will be able to go there from Archen. If any disturbances come from the Sanes village, then our troops will simply silence as many people as necessary. Therefore, be relieved, your highness."

Explained Zentos indifferently, with an emotionless tone of voice.

"But in the unlikely event that... and by unlikely, I mean there is one chance in ten thousand for this to happen, but, if the princess returns to Archen, then at that time, I had better be on standby here."

"Surely, you don't mean that she'll be able to break through the knight troops, right?"

"Yes, that is what I mean. As I said, the possibility of that happening is low, but it is her best chance to survive."

Although the report that Zentos had received was not detailed, it seemed like the people who had rescued the princess and her maids had also defeated two knights and killed a massive hydra.

They were likely adventurers that the princess happened to meet by chance, and they were probably very competent people.

If they were really outstanding, then they were surely going to consider the option of coming back to Archen.

"And when that time comes, I will personally kill all of them... So, the princess' chances of being saved are very slim, normally, it should be completely impossible for her to survive, unless the heavens themselves are on her side."

Following Zento's words, Carenas finally calmed down; he stopped pacing around, and sat down on a chair.

"Look, since you're following my personal plan, I will not tolerate any failures from you! Do not let me down again!"

"Please leave this to me, I will surely meet your expectations"

Zentos knelt on one knee and bowed his head down before Carenas.

At that moment, Carenas could not tell what kind of expression there was on the commander's face.



The day had already grown dark on the highway, and Kyle, who was sitting on the coachman's seat, talked to the people who were inside the carriage. There were four of them in total: the princess, her two maids, and Lize.

"Milena-sama, please lower your body just in case, and prepare for an impact. Lize, I'm leaving her to you."

"You can count on me."

Lize answered energetically.

『They'll be here soon.』

Reported Sildonia, who was still keeping watch on the knights from the sky and was estimating the time of their arrival.

"I see, then... 'Brave'!"

This was a mind-control spell which could give courage to recruits and adventurers who were still not used to fighting.

Now that Kyle had used the spell on the sleipnirs, they probably would not get agitated no matter what would happen after this.

"Are you ready over there, too?"

Said Kyle while aiming his voice towards the the top of the carriage.

"Yeah, leave this to us!"

"We are all good."

Replied Seran and Urza, who had attached themselves to the roof of the carriage so as not to fall even if it were to shake or sway.

Having confirmed that, Kyle lightly flicked the reins in his hands.

With loud neighs, the sleipnirs started galloping towards the town of Archen.

Chapter 11

"Slow down!"

The vice commander of the royal guard's second knight corps ordered the knights around him.

Although they were on a wide highway, it was too narrow for the 80 knights atop their horses to walk side by side, therefore, they were advancing in multiple rows instead, but in this area, there was a part of the forest that was more open, like a prairie.

In other words, that meant it was possible to circumvent and slip through the knights' formation.

Besides, the night had already come, and although they were using "Light" magic tools to broaden their field of vision to some extent, nothing could be done about the fact that it was more dark out than during the day, so they needed to increase their vigilance.

There was a possibility that the princess was being supported by some traveling adventurers. According to the reports of some subordinates, those adventurers were capable enough to kill a massive hydra, so the troops could not afford to be negligent in any way.

A report came from one of the knights who had been walking slightly ahead of the others.

"Vice commander! We've found a carriage, and it's coming right towards here!"

"They're coming here!"

Tension rose among the knights. What made them the most worried was whether or not that the sleipnirs' charge would be powerful enough to break through their formation.

"Spread!"

Following the vice commander's instructions, the knights moved in an orderly manner and spread their formation into a semi circle.

This was commonly referred to as the Crane Wing formation, and although it would thin down the defense on the front, it would conversely entice the enemy to advance, only to envelop them and to make it possible to attack them not only from the front, but also from the left and right. Moreover, it would make it impossible for the enemy to slip through from the sides, which made this formation great for ambushes.

At any rate, once the carriage and the sleipnirs drawing it were dealt with, the knights would be able to crush the enemy with numbers.

"Aim for the hoofs! We only have to stop them from moving!"

There were many people among the royal guard's knights who could use magic, and they had prepared bows and arrows as well. Their preparations were perfect.

Following the vice commander's orders, all the knights readied themselves to attack.

But right before the carriage entered the range of the magic spells, something came down from the sky and knocked against a knight who was in the front. The knight instinctively looked above him, and although he could not see much in the dark of the night, there seemed to be some kind of large bird in the sky. And the moment he thought about checking the object that had hit him, both that knight and his horse blew up.

The object that had fallen from the sky was an 'Explosion' magic stone.

Following that, there were multiple other explosions, and some other magic stones kept coming one after the other from the carriage that was facing the formation.

There were so many of these stones that it was more appropriate to say they were being sprinkled rather than thrown, moreover, they were being aimed precisely despite the long distance separating the coach from the knights.

But there weren't only explosions, there were also pillars of fire rising to the sky, storms of ice freezing the knights, tornadoes which were cutting everything to pieces, and there was even a toxic mist spreading in their formation.

Due to the explosions and the heat in the air, even the knights' trained horses were falling in a panic and becoming hard to control.

"How is this possible?!"

Yelled one of the knights, and that feeling was shared by all the other knights as well.

They had not been careless nor had they looked down on their opponents, but Kyle and his groups had gone completely against those knights' calculations, or rather, they had gone against common sense itself.

In total, the stones that Kyle and his companions had used were worth around a million Gadors, the fact that the group had so many magic stones on them was completely unimaginable.

Although the knights were also firing spells and arrows, they could hardly see anything due to the lights and the cloud of dust that had come after the explosions. So they could only fire their attacks while making an approximate guess about their target's position.

"Everyone, don't break the formation! Dismount your horses!"

As the vice commander desperately gave instructions to his subordinates, the magic stones continued to come towards them.

Then, the moment he thought he saw huge hooves come out of the cloud of dust and approach him, the vice commander was blown away and lost consciousness.

"How can I say this... That was incredible."

Said the princess while feeling partly amazed as she watched the scene of chaos that the carriage had just left behind.

Kyle, Urza and Seran, who had been outside, had received some minor injuries due to splinters. Therefore, they once again entrusted the driving to the maid Aluka, and they came back inside the carriage to rest and drink magic medicine. The sleipnirs were also given magic medicine to recover from their wounds, and although the coach had some traces of burns here and there, it was still able to go forward at the moment.

"Forcing your way through by using the cumulated power of a large amount of power stones was clever. It was simple but it went quite smoothly."

The first shot from the sky had not alerted the enemy at all and had been a success, then, Urza was able to precisely throw the magic stones one after the other by commanding her wind spirit, Sylphide.

"You can do some awesomely crazy things when you don't care about spending money."

Said Seran, as he recalled the scene from before, when he had been on top of the carriage, activating the magic stones to then hand them to Urza.

(In the end, Zentos really did not show up.)

Kyle felt from the bottom of his heart that his companions and him were very lucky. In the first place, if Zentos had been there, it wouldn't even have been possible to break through the enemy formation in such an absurd way. The Zentos that Kyle knew would have been able to instantly kill both of the sleipnirs, even in the middle of all of that chaos.

The truth was that, for various different reasons, Kyle absolutely did not want to fight against Zentos.

"Well, anyway, we can be a little relieved now."

There had probably not been that many casualties among the knights, but many of their horses should have been incapacitated. Even if they were to reorganize their troops to chase after Kyle's group, that was likely going to take some time, and their numbers would have considerably decreased by then. All that was left for Kyle's group to do now was to keep going forward, to sometimes lower their speed so that the sleipnirs would not collapse, and to give them some stamina recovery magic medicine.

There could be some more ambushes from that point forward, but Sildonia would be able to warn the group ahead of time.

However, naturally and as they expected, things did not keep going so well for long.

When the light of the sun started coming from the east, close to the middle of the highway that led to Archen, the carriage that Kyle's group had been riding was lying toppled on the ground by the side of the road.

"Guess it was too much after all."

Said Kyle with a bitter tone, as he looked at the coach's broken wheel. The coach had likely been damaged when it broke through the knights' formation. Rather, perhaps it was already good that it had held on until this point.

Fortunately, no one was injured when it fell down, but one of its wheels was completely broken.

"We can't do anything about this, we could repair it but that would take a lot of time."

Said Seran as he gave up since there was currently no time for this.

"Now that it came to this, we have no choice, we have to abandon the carriage. Milena-sama, you and your maids should get on the sleipnirs, we'll have to follow you as we can using Urza's 'Wind Walker' spell."

Now that they had come so far, the best choice for them was to keep running away until Archen, but naturally, their speed would now be considerably slower than before.

The problem was the second knight corps that the group had encountered earlier.

Due to the magic stone attack, many of them had surely been rendered incapable of fighting, however, since Urza had not been aiming precisely at the knights themselves, some of them were certainly left unhurt.

The ones who were still able to move around that time had probably reorganized themselves in a group and were likely frantically pursuing Kyle and the others with a burning anger.

The worst situation would be if this new formed group were to catch up when Kyle and the others would be busy fighting against the enemies that could be waiting to ambush them on the way to Archen.

In that scenario, princess Milena, who did not have the carriage's protection anymore and was the enemy's top priority target, would be directly aimed at by long-ranged attacks from both the front and the back.

"We just have to avoid getting caught in a pincer attack, no matter what..."

Given that there was no time to ponder on the situation, Kyle immediately made a decision.

"We need to stop the enemies who are coming after us. In other words, one of us has to remain behind to stop them. And since protecting the princess is our top priority... whoever stays will have to deal with them alone."

Said Kyle indifferently, but his words did not leave any room for objections.

"Kyle, don't tell me you...."

Urza's face became pale as she looked at Kyle.

Clever schemes like the ones from before were likely not going to work anymore, this time, the knights were likely going to come at full strength. And the one who would stay would have to hold all of them back alone. As Urza complained that Kyle was being reckless, he told her not to worry with a gentle smile, and then...

"So, with that said, try to do your best!"

Kyle patted Seran's shoulder.

"...Huh?"

Seran found himself unable to say anything.

"That's true, Seran is certainly qualified for this."

Lize agreed with Kyle's words.

"What the hell!?"

"Alright, we can't linger here. Let's hurry and leave."

Lize and the maids promptly started removing the sleipnirs' harnesses as Kyle instructed them to do so.

"Hey, listen here! I'm talking to you! You seriously want me to fight 80 knights of the royal guard by myself?!"

"No, many of them were probably injured, and, above all, I'm sure a lot of their horses can't be used anymore. So, there will probably be only less than half of them that will follow us."

『Mhm, that's true, they're already coming, and there are about 30 of them.』

Explained Sildonia.

"Oh, then it's fine... Wait, that still means I have to fight 30 knights of the royal guard who are full of killing intent!"

"Sorry but we don't have enough spare time to keep talking about this. They should be really close to here by now."

Kyle put his hands on both of Seran's shoulders from the front, and looked at

him face to face.

"Don't worry, if need be, I'll tell master that you were heroic in the end. Anything else you want me to tell her?"

"I don't have any last words for that old hag!"

When Seran said that, the maids finished the preparations and got on the backs of the sleipnirs together with the princess.

"Okay, we're leaving now. Urza, please use 'Wind Walker' on everyone."
"Ah, yes... But..."

Urza was looking at Seran with a conflicted expression on her face.

"Hurry! I don't know when they'll catch up!"
"A-alright!"

Urza gave her wind spirit Silphryde an order, and a swirl of wind coiled around the feet of Kyle and the others, making their legs lighter.

"Alright, let's go! Seran, I'll leave them to you!"
"Good luck!"

Kyle and Lize each gave Seran one last thumbs up in encouragement before departing.

Urza, princess Milena and the maids all looked back many times over at Seran, but eventually, he became blurry to them in the distance.

"...Seriously? They really left without me."

Seran sighed as he looked towards where Kyle and the others had run away, but there was no time to waste, so he hurriedly started moving.

He entered inside the forest that was beside the road and brought an adequate, long tree branch from there. Then, he took out a the sleeping bag that he was carrying inside the bag on his back, and he skillfully cut it to make a squared and white cloth which he tied to the tree branch.

What he had made was the worldwide symbol of surrender, a white flag.

"That will do it... wait, they're already here?"

On the highway, Seran heard a horse's neigh that came from the direction of the Sanes village.

It seemed like Kyle's words had been right on point.

Seran stood up on the carriage, which had been toppled on its side, and waved his flag in order to stand out. Then...

"I surrender! I have no intention to fight! I'll tell you everything you want to know so please spare my life!"

Seran shouted, appealing for the enemy's mercy.

"Stop!"

Ordered the vice commander, whose whole body was still feeling a dull pain despite the fact that he had taken healing magic medicine.

The troops had managed to gather the horses that could somehow still move, and after healing the knights with minor injuries, they had resumed their pursuit.

"Everyone, get down from your horses and advance, but stay alert!"

Like they were ordered to, the knights dismounted their horses and dispersed to put a distance between each other as they advanced forward.

If yet another magic stone attack were to be used, the knights would not be able to put up a resistance, and if even more horses were incapacitated, it would become impossible for them to pursue the princess.

But those magic stones were the only attack to look out and prepare for.

Normally, the knights would have been more cautious, but they did not have the time for that at all, since, upon the fifth corps' return, the secret mission given by the king would end in a failure.

But if the second corps' knights were to get close enough to the enemy, then he would find himself unable to use any magic stones due to the possibility of damaging himself in the process. And so, all of them pulled out their swords and got closer while perfectly prepared for battle.

"I'm really sorry! Everything that happened was due to Kyle being an idiot, I was just dragged into this! Please forgive me!"

Seran jumped down from the carriage and greeted the knights by getting down on his knees.

All the royal guard knights, including the vice commander, were slightly

bewildered.

They had been ready to fight when they found the carriage, they truly had not expected that the enemy would completely surrender all by himself.

The knights had been ordered to get rid of everyone that was involved in this whole matter. But although they were supposed to kill this enemy directly without talking to him, they could not eliminate him without asking him about their top priority target, the princess.

Moreover, there was a chance that the princess was still inside the carriage that was toppled over, so they first had to confirm that.

"Please, let me explain what's going on! The carriage's wheel broke and it fell down on its side. Right now, the princess and the others have gotten on the sleipnirs and are heading to Archen."

Seran started telling them everything before even being asked.

"They threw me away like I was some kind of sacrifice! That devil, Kyle, told me to stay here and to hold all of you back...As if that was freaking possible! I mean, that's crazy, right? Oh, don't worry, we used up the magic stones a while ago, and they don't have the carriage anymore either, so going at them with your numbers is basically the same as winning! So please have at it!"

Although Seran was earnestly appealing for the knights' kindness, there was no change in their sharp, bloodthirsty eyes.

Seran became teary eyed.

"Haha.... Ha... I, hmm... Oh that's right! I can give you some good information! Here, look at all the money I have!"

When Seran took his leather bag and turned it upside down, a large amount of dazzling treasures fell down, such as rings stacked with large gems, and gold coins from the Zanes kingdom.

Even untrained eyes would be able to tell that the precious gold's worth would well exceed a hundred thousand Gadors, and as expected, the royal guard's knights became noisy and started exchanging glances with each other.

"We found this in some ruins. I don't know if you've heard of that legendary Sanguld mountain range, but it turns out that there is a huge labyrinth inside it! It's thanks to that that we managed to prepare so many magic stones!"

Seeing that he had excited their interest, Seran kept babbling.

"I know that place! And I can tell you all about it in exchange for my life!"

Seran rubbed his forehead on the ground as he prostrated in tears. Seeing that, the vice commander sighed and then clicked his tongue.

"Enough! Someone go check the inside of the carriage, we'll get back to our pursuit after that. As for that man... get rid of him."

"We don't have any more time to waste" added the captain to his order, and the knights took action accordingly.

The men who were the closest the carriage went to check it, while the other knights lowered their weapons and prepared to return on their horses. Then, a knight who was near Seran approached him with a drawn-out sword.

"Aaaah!"

When the knight took hold of his sword to get rid of the enemy as he was asked to by the vice commander, Seran's response was to raise his voice like a dying frog, and to retreat back as he was, seeming like he was unable to stand back up.

He restlessly looked at his surroundings, then he focused his gaze on the knight in front of him, and he finally stood up on his knees and clung on the knight's leg.

"I don't want to die! Please spare me! I'll do anything, please!"

With a face full of tears and nasal mucus, Seran kept clinging to the man's leg while begging for his life.

The knight seemed to find Seran to be troublesome as he looked down on him with a gaze that contained some disdain but also a little pity.

And then, he prepared to attack.





"Hey, are you serious about this?!"

Urza, who had been continuously worrying in the back for a while, was finally unable to control herself anymore and spoke to Kyle.

"Serious about what?"

"About Seran! Are you fine with leaving him there like that?!"

"Oh, that.... Well, even I wanted to keep the casualties to a minimum, but this can't be helped. We just can't give our own lives in exchange for that."

"What!?"

Said Urza to Kyle, with a voice that did not conceal her anger in the slightest.

"I understand that you used that man as a sacrificial pawn.... but it doesn't seem to me like that would earn us much time."

Said the princess anxiously while riding on top of one of the sleipnirs. She was worried that this would, on the contrary, make the situation even worse if Seran were to tell the enemy about the group's circumstances.

"Ah, you do not need to worry at all. It will be fine."

Told Lize to the princess with a smile on her face.

"But this...."

"Lize, you too?! How can you stay so calm?! He's your childhood friend!"

Urza flared up at Lize as well.

"Huh? ... Oh, I see what's going on here. So you don't know, Urza?"

Said Lize, while thinking 'No wonder she doesn't get what we're saying'.

"I don't know? Don't know what?"

"Well... Not only is Seran incomparably stronger than me, he's actually also stronger than Kyle."



The moment the knight was about to slash his sword at the man that he was looking down on and who was miserably begging for his life, there was a clear metallic noise.

Looking at source of the sound, the knight saw a circle of metal rolling at his feet.

That was a so called "Binding bracelet". Since there was a 'Gravity' spell inside, it could quintuple the weight of the person wearing it and it was used on criminals who committed serious crimes. Any normal human would have a hard time walking with it.

But why was there such a thing here? The moment the knight asked himself that question, his whole world shook violently.

"Sorry about that, but you're the most competent among all of them, right? That's why I had to kill you first, no hard feelings."

When the knight heard that, the ground rapidly rose towards him and soon filled his field of view. That was the last scene that the knight ever saw, and he died without even realizing that his head had been cut off.

Having witnessed that, the surrounding knights were petrified. Their brains were unable to process that sight which was beyond their understanding. That man had been crying miserably and clinging to their companion while begging for his life, and then, he had suddenly drawn his sword with a godly speed to cut said companion's head off.

Just before that happened, the knights' tension had dropped to the point where they had even lowered their swords. They could not wrap their heads around the scene they had just witnessed, and even though they were veterans of the royal guard's knights, their reaction was still delayed for a mere instant. That instant was enough for Seran.

He dashed forward, almost reaching the speed of a hurricane.

He aimed for the knights who were walking towards their horses, and slashed his sword from behind them to quickly force his way forward.

Each of Seran's slashes was aimed at their vital points. Be it their heads, their necks, or their hearts.... he sliced those parts with a dreadful speed and accuracy, so as to instantly kill the enemies, and he continued to rush ahead. After six of them were killed, the knights finally drew their swords, but at the same moment, Seran leaped up as if wings had grown from his back.

He jumped so high up over them that he could be said to be flying, and he aimed for the vice commander who was standing behind them.

However, rather than slashing his sword at him, he attacked him with a

dropkick in the chest.

After landing, Seran quickly ran after the vice commander, who had been blown away, and he stepped on him while pointing his sword at his throat.

"All of you, don't move!!"

Like a roaring tiger, Seran yelled with a very loud voice which was filled with fighting spirit.

Any faint-hearted person would have lost consciousness just from hearing this. As one would expect, the knights, who had been about to slash their swords, did not faint, but they still stopped their movements given that the enemy was pointing his weapon at their vice commander.

Seran did not believe that he would be able to keep all the knights from taking action by simply holding their vice commanders hostage like this.

All he wanted was to stop the knights from moving for one more moment. And in that moment, he took a magic stone from his pocket. Naturally, what he had said about having used them all up was a lie.

He threw the stone in the middle of the horses that were behind him.

Following that, an explosion blew the horses away. The ones who weren't dead or injured were still driven into a state of panic, and ran away in all directions, either taking the highway towards the Sanes village, or going directly inside the forest that was on both sides of the road.

Since Seran was pointing his sword at the vice commander, the knights who were in front of him had failed to make a move and had lost all of their mounts. At that time, the first knight who had his head cut off and whose body was still gushing out blood like a water fountain, slowly fell down, as if he was finally realizing that he had lost his life.

"With this, your horses are all gone."

Said Seran with a fearless smile.

Seeing that, the remaining knights were struck with fear, like they had encountered a mysterious, unknown creature.

"Still, I didn't think I'd manage to beat eight of you with my first assault, that was lucky. Or maybe I overestimated you?"

That was a direct provocation, but it only served to make Seran appear even

more eerie.

Then, before the knights could come to their senses, he started attacking again. He kicked up the vice commander at his feet, and the man with his heavy equipment flew away if he was a mere pebble.

When the knight at the very front dropped his focus as he hesitated about catching the heavily wounded vice commander, his face was almost instantaneously pierced by Seran's sword.



"That man is... strong? Even stronger than you, Kyle-sama?"

Having been told that Seran was stronger than Kyle, who had defeated a hydra one-on-one, princess Milena was round-eyed with astonishment.

"That's not true at all, in my current state.... I should be roughly as strong as him if I use a self-strengthening spell."

Said Kyle while feeling somewhat grouchy due to Lize's words.

"Seriously!? As strong as Seran!? When did you become that strong?"

It seemed like Lize's reaction was one of genuine surprise.

"Ah, but obviously, if we were to start a combat, I'm sure he would forbid the use of magic... and I'm also sure it would be a very harsh fight."

The mere thought of such a fight made Kyle feel bad from the bottom of his heart, and that was visible on his face.

"Ho-hold on! What in the world are you two saying?"

Said Urza, seeming like she was unable to understand a single thing about the two friends' conversation.

"Well, it's only natural that you can't imagine this, but when it comes to fighting with a sword, and only with a sword, he's certainly stronger than me."

"I don't want to admit it but it's true" added Kyle while sighing at the same time.

"Seran has no talent for magic, and as a person, his personality is fundamentally rotten. But when it comes to the sword, he's a rare talent; no,

actually, rare is an understatement, there are no adjectives to express exactly how talented he is. Besides, he's not letting that get to his head, and he's constantly putting great efforts into forging his talent without being negligent. So, yes, if you compare our mastery of the sword only, he's a genius who's far beyond me."

Leila, who was Kyle's master in the art of the sword, had told him that he was a talent that was seen only once in a hundred years.

But when it came to Seran, her son: "He's the kind of talent that only appears once in a thousand years, no, maybe only once in history, there have never been anyone as talented as him, and there probably won't be anyone else like him in the future" That was what Leila had said.

"Why do I have to teach him when I know full well that he'll become way stronger than me anyway even if I let him train by himself? This is the worst, it's so stupid." That was how she used to lament, but she would still reluctantly teach the sword to Seran despite her complaints.

"He often goes off alone to wander aimlessly, doesn't he? Well, at those times, he usually goes to train his sword skills by himself. Though he's helpless when it comes to everything else, he's proportionally diligent when it comes to the sword."

"That's certainly true. But he has lost some important human qualities in exchange for that, hasn't he?"

It wasn't clear whether the two were praising or insulting their childhood friend.

Kyle recalled that he never won any mock sword fight against Seran.

But as Kyle had said to Lize, if he were to use magic to strengthen himself, then he would likely be just as strong as Seran, and perhaps he would even be able to gain the upper-hand if he fought him, although that would not apply against the strength that Seran had during the battle with the demon king.

However, at present, if they were to fight with their swords only, then there would be no contest. Kyle was quite conscious about that difference in their abilities.

Besides, Seran's sword skills were not the only reason he was a strong, or rather, a troublesome opponent.

Due to his personality, he could do absolutely anything for the sake of his goals, because he did not have any pride and so he wasn't concerned about using unfair or cowardly methods when necessary.

And that made him an efficient fighter.

"But.... That doesn't show at all in his behavior. If he's that capable, how do you explain his usual attitude?"

Urza was still not convinced.

"... Would anyone ever be cautious of Seran when looking at the way he usually behaves?"

Kyle's words sent a chill down Urza's spine, like a block of ice sliding down her back.

"Surely you don't mean that.... Seran's usual behavior... is all just an act?"

Upon seeing Seran behave in such a way when meeting him for the first time, anyone would make the mistake of ignoring him and making light of him. In fact, Urza herself had made light of him, and even though she had been around him for a while, she had never seen through his true capabilities. Had she fought him, she would probably have been killed instantaneously. If his usual attitude was nothing but a calculated facade, then....

A feeling resembling fear ran up Urza's back.

"No, I think that only half of his attitude is an act, and the other half is his true nature."

Said Kyle briefly, and Lize followed up.

"In the past, I also used to think that it was only half of it, but recently, I'm actually starting to think that 90% of it is his true nature."

"....That true. In the end, I think he got that personality from birth."

"Oh, so that's what's going on. That's a relief."

Urza was somewhat reassured.

while thinking of the battle that was likely taking place around this time, Kyle looked behind him.

"Most of the royal guard's knights are just following orders. I didn't want

them to be killed if possible."

Since there were 30 of those knights, Seran was likely not going to be able to afford to hold back.

Moreover, he would never forgive someone who came at him with a weapon and killing intent.



Seran and the royal guard's knights were confronting each other. There were already only eight people left standing among the knights; in total, more than twenty of them had been sliced by Seran's sword.

It was unimaginable that the power of those mighty sword swings was coming from Seran, whose body did not differ much from an ordinary person's. His slashes could cut through everything, be it the enemy's swords or the armors they were using to protect themselves.

And those attacks were sharply and accurately hitting the knights' vitals. To defend against this, they had no other choice than to dodge very skillfully.

The difference in strength between the knights and Seran was akin to the difference between a cat and a tiger.

Nevertheless, those were still thirty of the country's best knights. So, as one would expect, Seran was not left uninjured. He had some wounds here and there on his body, and he was somewhat running out of breath.

Initially, Seran had taken control of the battle's pace and was able to manipulate it to his advantage, but the knights, who had regained their spirits, were well coordinated, and they were making the best out of their advantage in numbers as they fought.

(As expected of the imperial guard's knights, they're damn persistent. Even now, there is still some life left in their eyes. But....)

After thinking that, Seran sighed and spoke up.

"What a drag."

He said while relaxing his body.

"Let's end things here."

"What....?"

Said dubiously one of the knights who had survived.

"I told you at first, didn't I? My role is to hold you back here. Slaughtering you all is not my goal. Your horses are gone and you're out of time. At this point, there is no way for you to catch up with the princess... In short, I don't have any reason to fight you anymore."

Having said all that, Seran put his sword back in its sheath and turned his back on the knights.

The knights were astonished by this. But even though that moment should have been a good opportunity for them to attack, they could not picture themselves killing him at all, on the contrary, they could vividly picture themselves getting killed by a slash of his sword instead.

"Of course, it's a whole other story if you say that you still want to fight, but you should be well aware of how powerful I am. I won't chase after you if you just leave though."

The knights were not afraid to die on duty. However, that did not mean they were willing to die in vain.

As Seran had said, their mission had already basically failed. It would be meaningless for them to give their lives here.

"If you've made up your minds, you should hurry and do it. Your vice commander over there is still barely alive, and there are some other fellows that you'll be able to save if you hurry up. I do have some healing magic medicine, but I have no obligation to share it with you."

Seran distanced himself from the knights and entrusted his back to one of the trees in the forest by the side of the road. Then, he showily started drinking his healing magic medicine.

Afterwards, having likely made their decision, the knights exchanged glances with each other before taking action.

Two of them used their shoulders to support their vice commander, and the other knights who were still breathing were also carried.

At that time, the knights had not dropped their guards and were still watching Seran, but once they felt like there was absolutely no way he would be able to chase after them, they left the scene.

Before long, they had taken a considerable distance away from him, and the moment when all of the knights started running towards the town of Archen— Seran started running without making a sound and he threw his last magic stone at their backs.

The knights were blown off by the explosion, and before the resulting cloud of smoke could dissipate, Seran kept running and using his sword to skillfully finish off anyone who was still breathing.

"Sorry, to be honest, I was already set on not letting anyone escape from the start. One of you seemed like he was about to run away for his life soon due to fear, so I had to put on a little act."

Said Seran while using his sword to deal a finishing blow to the vice commander, who he had kept alive to the very end so as not to have to go through the trouble of chasing after the other knights.

"You guys already know about the treasures we found in the Sanguld mountains. Those treasures are probably one of Kyle's important lifelines, so on the off chance that you'll leak that information, I can't let you go."

If Lize had been here, she would have retorted with "But you're the one who went and told them about that", but Seran was actually being very serious, he had not done this to mock his opponents.

Telling the enemies about the treasures so as to make them drop their guard, then silencing those same enemies because they had heard about the treasure from him, to Seran, each of these individual actions were completely natural and even necessary.

"Hah~.... I'm beat."

After carefully confirming that he was the only man who was still alive in the perimeter, Seran sat down.

He had just put his life on the line to take on 30 knights of the royal guard all by himself. His stamina and injuries might have recovered thanks to the magic medicine, but mentally, he was exhausted.

"I've done my part here, so you better not fail over there."

He muttered while directing his gaze towards Archen.

Chapter 12

In a certain room of one of Archen's inns, Zentos was looking at the card which had stopped transmitting the regular messages that he had been exchanging with his subordinates.

Even if something had happened to the vice commander, someone else would be acting as his substitute. The fact that he could not communicate with the knights despite that meant that they had likely been annihilated.

There was still no expression on Zentos' face, his clenched fist was trembling. He then left the room and gave an order to his remaining subordinates.

"You must stand guard for his Highness. Don't let anyone pass by here before my return."

Having said that while not leaving any room for objections, he went out of Archen on top of his personal horse.

As for Kyle's group, they were about to get out of the large forest soon. After leaving the forest, they would be back on the main road, right next to Archen. The town would soon come in their field of vision. Precisely because they were close to their goal, Kyle focused his attention all the more so as not to get distracted. And then, a report came from Sildonia.

『Kyle, there is a knight heading here. 』

"How many people are there with him?"

『None, he's all by himself... Oh?!』

Sildonia raised her voice out of surprise.

"Is something wrong?"

『Mhm, I was just attacked by an 'Energy bolt' spell even though I had taken plenty of distance. To keep such power and accuracy from this far is a pretty big deal. 』

"Energy bolt" was a lower-class spell with low power which would attack an

opponent using a magical arrow, but thanks to its range and its little cost in mana, it was used as a foundation for attack spells.

"I see, he noticed a bird moving suspiciously in the sky so he attacked without any hesitation. Given that he aimed accurately despite the long distance, he must have a high control over his magical powers. Knowing this, the knight who's coming here can only be.... him."

"So he still came in the end", added Kyle with a heavy sigh.

"I was hoping from the bottom of my heart that he wouldn't come, but it seems like things won't go my way."

Although Kyle did not want to fight, he still resolved himself since there was no avoiding this.

He stopped the sleipnirs, and instructed the rest of the group.

"Everyone, go retreat a little and stay on standby. If you sense anything that's even just remotely strange, go back further down the highway and join Seran."

"But, will you be alright, Kyle?"

Said Lize worriedly, having felt a tension that she had not felt before within Kyle's words.

"...This will definitely be harder than dealing with that Hydra or with the thirty knights of the royal guard."

"So Zentos is coming."

A grave expression appeared on the face of the princess, who had likely guessed this from Kyle's words alone.

"He's the best knight in all of Jirgus. Are you saying that you'll face him by yourself?"

Kyle was also aware of the severity of the situation. If possible, he would have preferred to face Zentos together with Seran, Urza, and Lize, no matter how cowardly that would have been.

"I also absolutely want to avoid this, but at this point, there is no other way. Don't worry, I'll be careful."

“Rest assured, it’ll be fine” Leaving everyone with only those words, Kyle once again started to walk.

『You seem to have some sort of connection to him. 』

Sildonia spoke quietly to Kyle, who was full of vigor.

"Something like that. Also, I’m sorry, but, is it okay with you if I do as I like in this fight?"

『Good grief, you’re really hopeless. 』

Complained Sildonia, but she did not say anything else other than that.

Having taken enough distance from Lize and the others, Kyle kept waiting in the middle of the road in an imposing stance, until he noticed a man on top of a horse, approaching at an extreme speed.

The man also noticed Kyle, and having likely judged that it would be dangerous to approach any further with his mount, he stopped it and dismounted it.

Zentos then approached on foot, and when he was a single step away from reaching the exact range at which the battle could commence, Kyle talked to him.

"Don’t worry, I’m the only one here, there is no trap."

"Are you one of the travelers helping Princess Milena? ...I see, you do seem competent."

Zentos strengthened his guard as he faced Kyle, who had an accurate grasp over the distance that was separating him from his opponent.

"Well, I’m only so-so. But why are you alone? There should still be around ten knights left among your people."

"I don’t want to lose any more of my men on a matter like this one. I just have to kill all of you myself."

Zentos said that he would kill everyone in Kyle’s group because he had enough power and self-confidence to back up his words.

"Is that so? Sorry, but most of the knights who were pursuing us were eliminated. Also, how do I say this... If possible, could you surrender? I don’t want to kill you, and I don’t want you to die either."

"What did you just say?"

Zentos furrowed his brows.

He never thought he would be looked down upon and even asked to surrender so straightforwardly by a young man who was 10 years younger than him.

"Certainly, you might not be able to escape from being sentenced for a capital crime, but I could ask for your life to be spared in exchange for giving up on my reward. If you want, you can ask for other conditions."

As Kyle said that, the expression on Zentos' face grew more and more dubious.

That was because Zentos could tell that Kyle was seriously trying to help, even though he was trying to kill him and frame him for the princess' murder.

"I don't get your motive, why'd you want to help me?"

"I just sincerely believe that it would be a shame for Zentos Ordiy to die here."

"... I'm glad you think that much of me, but it's too late for me to quit the mission."

"Yeah, I figured you'd say that, it's only natural."

Even though he had known this would be the answer, Kyle had not been able to stop himself from asking.

"I want to ask one more thing. Why do something as foolish as trying to assassinate the princess? At the very least, it wasn't for the money nor to raise your position, was it? Moreover, I heard that you're following that Carenas guy's plans. Is there any worth to that?"

"Seems like you know a lot about the situation.... Or maybe you heard about it from the princess? Anyway, for now, let's just say that it's a complicated story."

Kyle had expected this answer, too.

"... Even so, this plan is full of holes, isn't it? It's actually already on the verge of failing. Speaking frankly, it's a pretty sloppy plan."

"We'll be able to fix that as long as I silence all of you people."

"Say what you like, but you've pushed things really far now, haven't you? Some people will have suspicions."

"You're going to die very soon so you don't have to concern yourself with that."

Believing that it would be futile to talk any more than this, Zentos pulled out his sword.

"I can't let you buy any more time than this. I have to quickly kill you and then chase after the princess."

"...Well, I suppose it was obvious that you'd notice what I was trying to do."

"Guess that's as much as I'm gonna get" Thought Kyle while pulling out his sword.

Just like Zentos has said, Kyle had been buying time.

Even though Zentos was his opponent, Kyle figured that it would be possible to capture him alive by using numbers as long as he could keep earning time until the fifth knight corps' arrival.

Because, in the present situation, Kyle had not other choice than to kill Zentos if he didn't want to be killed.

However, they weren't there yet, so, in the meantime, Kyle started chanting to launch some magic spells.

And so did Zentos.

" 'Haste' 'Strength'!"

" 'Haste' 'Strength'!"

Simultaneously, the two of them used self-reinforcement spells to boost their respective speed and strength.

And so, a fight began between Kyle and the man who had been his model in the ways of a magic swordsman in his previous life.

Zentos made the first move.

He raised his sword above his head to attack with a head-on front blow aimed at the crown of Kyle's head — However, that attack was actually a mere illusion made through the use of the "Illusion" spell.

Even though it was just an illusion, the blow was filled with killing intent, to the point where it would make even a first class warrior move his body by reflex, and there were few differences between the intensity of this illusion and the real thing.

However, Zentos' real attack was an upper slash from below, which was difficult to deal with and came almost at the same time as the illusory attack, with only a slight delay of difference.

So far, no one had been able to defend against this attack upon seeing it for the first time. This sure-kill attack, which was mixed with a magic feint, had brought many of Zentos' opponents to their doom.

However, Kyle easily avoided it.

"Wha-...!?"

Zentos raised his voice out of shock.

Having dodged sideways, Kyle calmly swung his sword downward, aiming for Zentos' dominant arm.

But, since Zentos instantly jumped back, he merely received a superficial wound on his arm.

"Damn you..."

Zentos was grinding his teeth while glaring at Kyle, who had not only dodged his sure-kill attack, but had also injured his arm.

However, Kyle actually clicked his tongue.

That was because he had missed the best and only opportunity to beat Zentos while keeping him alive.

"If I had chopped off his arm just now, I could have incapacitated him, but..."

Kyle spoke with a pained and a bitter tone.

Since Zentos wanted the fight to be over as soon as possible, Kyle had figured that his first blow would be this one as he was very confident in it and it was a sure-kill attack.

Now, Zentos was using normal attacks and was slashing his sword over and over again. Under that assault, Kyle was retreating little by little. He was handling Zentos' fierce attacks very well, by sometimes avoiding them, and sometimes parrying them with his sword.

Kyle was patiently withstanding the attacks, and once there was a slight gap in Zentos' defense, he slashed his sword without a moment's delay.

Although Zentos easily dodged the slash, Kyle almost simultaneously sent a kick towards his crotch.

There was no change to Kyle's extraordinarily balanced stance as he used his upper body to attack with his sword while he launched that sharp kick towards his opponent, but Zentos managed to block the kick with the handle of his

weapon.

This manner of fighting by including kicks in one's attacks was Leila's forte, therefore, her students, Kyle and Seran often used kicks as well.

"What a vicious foot technique!"

"Well, I'm just following my master's teachings!"

Following the kick, Kyle used Zentos' sword like a springboard to jump behind him and to land a great distance away from him after rotating once in the air. And the moment he landed, Kyle threw an 'Explosion' magic stone at Zentos. The explosion's blast could reach a wide range so it would be able to deal some great damage to Zentos even if he were to dodge.

However, having received a report about the magic stones beforehand, Zentos stepped forward instead of dodging and used the flat of his sword to repel it towards Kyle.

Kyle was able to bear the resulting flames thanks to his armor's fireproof ability, but the shock of the explosion still assaulted his whole body.

Zentos rushed forward with his sword as if tearing through the cloud of dust that rose due to the explosion's blast and he aimed for Kyle's neck.

When the blade was a few milometers away from the nape of Kyle's neck, he barely managed to parry it with the guard of his sword, despite his reaction having been delayed by the impact of the explosion.

Even so, Zentos kept pushing his sword forward with all his strength, trying to cut Kyle's neck, and Kyle was also clenching his teeth while doing his utmost to resist.

For a little while, the blade and the sword guard continued to stay in a lock, and then the blade slowly started digging into Kyle's flesh until blood started to trickle down his neck, but Zentos suddenly jumped back and took some distance.

There was a skin-deep, distinct, bleeding scar left on the nape of Kyle's neck. Zentos had likely also suffered some considerable damage due to the explosion.

The two fighters were now facing each other, gasping for air while trying to put their breathing back in order.

"As expected... he's strong."

Although the Zentos that Kyle knew was the one from three years in the future, he was almost as powerful now as he was back then. There was no big difference between Kyle's skill with the sword and Zentos'. However, Zentos' basic physical capabilities, like his speed and strength, exceeded Kyle's. Normally, Kyle would make up for that difference in strength by using his magic, but he and Zentos were equal when it came to magic, so that difference was still very much present. And since Zentos could keep his calm at all times, using tricks like the magic stones from earlier would not work either. Kyle's assessment was that Zentos was clearly stronger than him in his current state. But Kyle still had some leeway since he possessed a few advantages over Zentos.

"That's a good sword..."

Zentos was looking at Sildonia that Kyle was wielding. From the several blows which he had already exchanged with it, he understood that this sword was an amazing treasure. Given that he was a commander of the royal guard's knights, Zentos' sword was quite good as well, but Sildonia was on a whole other level. If Zentos were to parry a blow unskillfully, his sword would break, leaving him with no chance of winning. It was quite disadvantageous for him to fight while having to worry about his weapon. The reason he had withdrawn earlier, when his weapon was locked with Kyle's, was because he did not want to damage his sword.

"I'll thank you in her stead, I'm sure she appreciates the compliment... Look, I'll ask you one more time, how about you just surrender? Oh, and, if surrendering is really impossible, why don't you escape to another country? I'll help to arrange that for you."

"...You're a persistent guy."

"I could even give you some escape funds, what do you think?"

"If you want to help me that much, how about you stand still and let me kill you?"

"Yeah, how about no? Ask for something cheaper, can't you?"

Said Kyle with a light laugh.

"He hasn't lost his calm at all... Just how experienced can he be at his age?"
Thought Zentos in astonishment as he watched Kyle's state.

In the first place, it would be impossible for any normal person to joke around with their opponent in a life or death battle like this one.

Even in the attack from earlier, if Kyle had reacted one instant too late, his head would have likely been separated from the rest of his body, and yet it had not agitated him in the slightest.

It seemed like he was used to fighting against opponents who were much stronger than him.

And, more than anything else, the hardest thing to deal with were Kyle's abnormally good reactions to Zentos' attacks.

It was as if he had fought Zentos many times before.

That first attack that used a magic feint was one of Zentos' trump cards, there were few people who knew about it.

Because most of the people who had witnessed it were dead.

"You... How did you manage to react like that against my first attack? ...Do you know me?"

Zentos had absolutely no recollection of the man in front of him.
However, the man surely knew him in some way, that at least was a certainty for Zentos.

"Well, how do I say this.... I can't really explain in words whether I know you or not. I've had quite the curious life. But if you want me to, I can explain all the details to you from the beginning."

"That sounds like it will take too long so I'll have to say no. I can't let you drag things on any longer than this."

Kyle showed a big grin in response to Zentos' words.

"Well, of course I'll try to drag the situation, that's the reason why I'm fighting you in the first place."

Kyle's biggest advantage was time.
From Zentos' perspective, the princess could escape to a place out of his reach

while he was fighting here.

But conversely, for Kyle, earning time would allow rescue to come.

And at that point, the match would be decided.

Zentos was well aware that Kyle was trying to prolong the fight instead of trying to win.

"...This means I'll have to be the one who ends this."

In Zentos' original schedule, he expected, or rather, he needed Kyle to already be dead by now.

When he realized that, overall, he was actually the one being cornered, the look in Zentos' eyes changed. So far, he had been fighting with all his strength, but now, he was ready to put his life on the line.

From here on out, he wasn't going to leave any spare energy for himself to overthink things anymore, and he was going to focus all his power into a life endangering assault.

"I guess it does."

Sensing a killing intent that felt as if it was burning his skin, Kyle also took a fighting stance.

"I'll just kill you right now, and chase after the princess immediately after."

"...My name is Kyle by the way.... Kyle Leonard."

"....I'll remember it, Kyle."

"Well, yeah, that's the last name you'll ever hear... You'll only have to remember it for the next tens of seconds."

From there, the two men stopped speaking. Now, they were only going let their weapons talk for them.

With his sword lowered, Zentos charged ahead in a forward-bent posture. He completely gave up on defending for this attack, he was likely aiming for a simultaneous exchange of strikes. Having realized that his defense would be useless against this, Kyle prepared to thrust his weapon to meet his enemy's attack.

Right before they entered each other's range of attack, Kyle thrust his sword forward while Zentos simultaneously lowered his body even further.

The sword, which been aimed at Zentos' heart, left a big hole in his left

shoulder, but he stepped forward without worrying about that.

And the moment Kyle tried to bring his weapon back towards himself, Zentos repelled it upwards, using the pommel of his sword.

Both of Kyle's arms were repelled upwards with great strength, and while his sword did not escape his hands, his arms were now raised above his head.

Kyle's body was left completely unguarded, and it was right in front of Zentos.

"I got you!"

Given his capabilities, Zentos would be able to cut through both Kyle's armor and body with this single slice of his sword from the left flank.

Though he was aware that Kyle's sword was approaching him from above, Zentos had put all his strength in this attack and he was convinced that his sword would be the first one to reach its target.

After Zentos' slice hit Kyle's flank, he felt a certain resistance and — — with a dull clunk, his sword broke in two.

"Wha...."



When Zentos instinctively raised his wide-opened eyes, all he saw was a sword blade right in front of him, and the face of Kyle, whose eyes were full of sadness.

"As you'd expect from Zentos, that part of the armor was cleanly sliced, even though it's made of dragon leather... Still, there is no way he could damage this."

While patting his flank, Kyle brushed the gap which had appeared in the part of his armor that had been sliced.

From that gap fell a blood-like red gem, the "Dragon god's heart".

Even though Zentos' slash could cut and slice through rocks and steel alike, it was not able to damage this legendary "Dragon god's heart" which existed since the mythical era.

However, Kyle's complexion was bad. The "Dragon god's heart" had been able to defend against the slash, but the resulting shock had apparently damaged Kyle's ribs and internal organs. Even now, he was still feeling a throbbing pain. As for Zentos, he was lying down in a sea of his own blood.

He had suffered from a fatal cut that went from his shoulder straight to his heart. It was likely thanks to the strength of his will that he was still barely able to breath.

"Did you let me... repel your sword... on purpose...?"

While vomiting blood, Zentos spoke with a hoarse and weak voice.

"No, it wasn't on purpose. I was serious, my attack was completely serious and you really did repel my sword.... I also thought I might be cut right in half."

In a direct confrontation, especially if Zentos were to put his life on the line, Kyle could not win by himself; for Kyle this was an undeniable fact, no matter how much he thought about it.

Therefore, knowing that he might end up fighting against Zentos and starting from the assumption that he was going to be killed, Kyle had begun thinking from the day before about the methods that he could use to reverse the situation.

And since he was not able to make enough preparations, the only way he had come up with was this one.

"Actually, we've had several bouts before, and I've fought maybe hundreds of time against the illusory version of you. So I was able to predict that the fight would go like this. And I figured it was inevitable for me to use this method."

Once Zentos attacked while putting his life on the line, the only method for Kyle to fight him was to put his life on the line as well. If he had changed his position ever so slightly, if his timing had been off by even one instant, Kyle would have likely died.

Although Zentos, who was on the brink of death, did not understand what Kyle meant by saying that he had had several bouts against him, he was still amazed by the rashness and recklessness required to walk so close to the brink of death.

"What.... that's insane...."

"Well, I decided to do it because I had faith in you and your skill. I was convinced that, if it came from Zentos Ordiy, such an attack would take my life for sure, so I had no other choice."

Zentos weakly laughed at the words of Kyle, who seemed like he sincerely had an absolute faith in him.

And then, using his last breath to mutter something to himself, Zentos Ordiy perished.

"I'm sorry... I... there are people that I absolutely have to protect, no matter the sacrifices needed for it."

Kyle looked behind him, while picturing the faces of Lize and Urza who were likely standing not too far from there.

"..... You were one of the people that I wanted to save in this life, damn it... I never thought I'd have to watch you die a second time.... Farewell, comrade."

While dragging his wounded body and heart, Kyle went back to his group.

Chapter 13

Within a room of a certain inn in Archen, prince Carenas was pacing around, like a beast locked up in a cage.

As he started getting irritated about the assassination's success having yet to be reported, the room's door was violently opened.

"Hey, Zentos, what the hell took you so... Ah!?"

Prince Carenas was knocked off his feet without being given any chance to argue.

The one who had entered the room and hit the prince was none other than Kyle.

Following behind Kyle, the female knights of the royal guard's fifth knight corps rushed inside as well.

And even further behind was Princess Milena, who was ordering said knights. After the end of the fight against Zentos, Kyle and the others had advanced further on the highway toward Archen, until they met up with the fifth corps' knights on the way.

Then, under princess Milena's orders, they broke into this inn. After restraining the remaining knights of the second corps, they entered the prince's room.

"Killen, search this room at once. Zentos might have been cautious but this brother of mine surely has left some evidence."

"Yes!"

While staying in the back, princess Milena instructed the commander of the imperial guard's fifth knight corps, Killen, who was also her close aide. Killen was a tall and beautiful woman, but she had sharp eyes and an atmosphere that did not allow people to come near her.

"Also, restrain prince Carenas. We'll be returning to the royal capital Marad now, so we'll interrogate him on the way. Once we've gathered enough proof and witnesses, we'll report to my father."

"Yes... However, will he talk?"

Killen knew prince Carenas well.
Even if she were to question him, he would not answer obediently. He'd likely avoid the responsibility while finding excuses and claiming his own innocence to the point of looking unsightly.

"In case he doesn't talk, then you may use a little force... You'll just have to say that he confessed on his own."
"...Understood."

Killen bowed her head and separated from the princess in order to go give her subordinates their orders.
With a light sigh, princess Milena approached Kyle, who seemed worn-out and had sat down after striking the prince.

"Kyle-sama, please, I'd like you and you friends to accompany us as well."
"Yes... Also, thanks for listening to my selfish request."

Kyle stood up and bowed his head to the princess who had gladly heeded his request when he had asked if he could hit Prince Carenas.

"No, I should be the one thanking you, I owe you a hundred times more than that... There might still be various things to deal with, but this matter should be over now. Please allow me to express my gratitude again once we are back to the royal capital."

Princess Milena also deeply bowed to Kyle.
Thus, the major incident of the princess' assassination ended with a failure on the perpetrators' part.



At the center of Jirgus' royal capital, Marad, there was a large palace that was famous even among the surrounding countries. It symbolized the prosperity of the country.

Kyle and his team were deep within said palace, in a guest room that was located in the royalty's living quarters.

Although it was a guest room, it was still splendid since that was where the king would usually welcome state guests. Lize was sitting down inside the extravagant and dazzling room, seeming like she was restless. Even so, she appeared to have calmed down after hitting Seran, as usual, for trying, as

always, to make a pass at a court lady who was serving the group. Urza had a sullen face while thinking that she was too out-of-place in this human palace. As for Sildonia, she was earnestly eating the sweets that were given to her and asking for seconds.

Facing Kyle and the others was princess Milena, who was drinking tea with a light smile.

"No need to be so tense, all of you are important guests."

"Please excuse us for just doing as we please..."

Kyle apologized in the group's stead.

After a little while, the group was informed that someone was coming to visit them, and they all stood at attention while waiting.

Then, the palace's chamberlain opened the room's door and the one who entered was a man at the prime of his life, wearing a crown and a mantle that had the jirgus' royal family's lion crest embroidered on it; he was the king of the Jirgus country.

"Oh Milena, you're safe!"

Upon entering the room, king Raymond trotted towards Milena and hugged her closely.

"Yes, father."

"Thank goodness, when I heard what happened, I was worried sick..."

After showing great delight from seeing that his daughter was safe, the king frowned and asked.

"So, was what the report said true?"

"Yes, my older brother was aiming for my life together with Zentos, and we've currently restrained him. The evidence and witnesses have already been gathered."

"I see..."

Said the king with a bitter tone, while looking up at the ceiling. Even though the prince was part of the royal family, the only outcome for this kind of crime was the death penalty; moreover, that punishment had to be ordered by none other than the king himself.

"Father... My elder brother might have been injured in the monsters' attack, and maybe he'll need to rest for a long time."

Understanding the meaning of his daughter's words, the king showed a surprised face.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yes, that will be better for the country."

Princess Milena's meaning was that, rather than letting a matter like this one out in the world, it was better to pass it off as an accident.

"... I understand, that will certainly be better. Carenas will be sent to Curtim."

Curtim was a small town surrounded by mountains, located in the north of Jirgus, and it was used as a summer resort by the royal family.

The prince was going to be strictly confined there in the name of recovering from his injuries and from a disease that came due to complications.

Perhaps until the day of his death.

"And I guess I... had better avoid meeting with him from now on. No matter how foolish he is, he's still my son but...."

"But I can't let my emotions dictate my actions", added the king.

"But what's unbelievable above all is that Zentos actually cooperated with a ploy like this one."

"Yes, I still don't understand this. Why would he do such a foolish thing...."

"Mhm, maybe it's another country's plot..... or, I don't even want to think of this possibility, but maybe it was the work of demons. We'll scrutinize the evidence and witnesses to try to get an answer."

"Please do."

After that, king Raymond saw Kyle and the others for the first time.

"Are you the travelers who saved Milena?"

"Yes."

Kyle started kneeling down, and Lize and the others were about to imitate him, but the king raised his hand to stop them.

"It's all right, you're my daughter's benefactors, there is no need for such

formalities. As a father, I'd like to thank you."

"You're too kind, your majesty.."

Answered Kyle while bowing.

"I believe you've heard us, but this whole situation will be referred to as a monster attack in the public. Telling others about this matter will not be allowed, you understand?"

"Of course, we would never dare to say anything that could harm the country of Jirgus."

"It's all right, father, I was not only saved by them, but I was also moved by their characters. These people are worth trusting."

The princess put in a good word on behalf of the group.

"I see, if you say so, then I'm willing to believe it... I'll be sure to give you a reward fitting of your great accomplishment."

With those parting words, the king left the guest room.

—— When prince Carenas and princess Milena were on the way to pay a visit to the Sanes village, a large crowd of monsters, including a hydra with a low rank dragon's strength, had attacked their troops, causing great damage. Starting from Zentos, whose name was famous even in the surrounding countries, over half of the royal guard's second corps' knights had died. Furthermore, prince Carenas was injured and it was going to take a long time for him to recover.

The only fortunate point was that princess Milena was safe thanks to the actions of a few travelers who happened to pass by ——.

This was how the whole matter was announced to the public, and only a few people knew the actual truth.

As for Kyle and his group, their fame had soared in a flash due to their rescue of the princess.

By all rights, Kyle should have been able to become a knight for an achievement like this one, but since he declined the position, he was awarded with a Saint Randenale medal instead.

It was a medal which was named after a saint who lived in Jirgus hundreds of years in the past. This was the highest ranking that an ordinary person could

get, and no one else had received this reward in the last few decades.

"Say, say, does this suit me?"

Said Lize as she spun around in front of Kyle while lightly pinching the hem of her dress' skirt, as the group was waiting in an antechamber for the medal award ceremony.

What Lize was wearing right now was a dress that was lent for ceremonies like this one. With its light pink color, it evoked the sight of a flower, and the same applied to the hair ornament that she was wearing. This suited her well.

"Yeah, it looks good on you."

Answered Kyle, who was similarly wearing a ceremonial attire. He was not just flattering her, he was being as sincere as can be, he was truly a little fascinated by her at the moment.

"You think so? I feel like it's not my style, but maybe it's nice to wear something like this once in a while."

Lize was likely also aware that Kyle was being completely honest, and she started looking at her own dress-up in a good mood.

Urza was wearing a light green, slightly open dress.

Moreover, her long ears, characteristic of the elves, were coming out of her nicely coiffured hair, making her look like a beauty that came from a painting.

"In the end, I still think I'm too out of place here, but..."

Said Urza, whose face seemed quite bitter in contrast to Lize's content facial expression.

Urza felt like there were various problems with someone like her receiving a medal here, given that she didn't come from Jirgus, and she was of the elven race, a completely different species. However, princess Milena had insisted that it was perfectly fine for her to be here.

"Besides, I'm no good when it comes to dressing up like this..."

Added Urza dejectedly while recalling how, earlier, she was made to wear different dresses one after the other by the princess' maids, as if she was a dress-up doll.

"I know you don't have much experience with these things, but you've already come this far, so I won't ask you to exchange civilities with people, but please try to put on a little smile."

"Hmm..... L-like this?"

As Urza showed an indescribable, forced smile, Kyle replied "Well, that will do, keep it up." with a similarly indescribable face.

As one would expect, the group was not allowed to take any weapons with them, so Sildonia had to sit the ceremony out.

Sildonia had been pouting earlier, displeased that she could not get anything from the feast that was going to be served in the dinner party after the ceremony, so Kyle was wondering if he should pack some leftovers and pastries to bring them to her. At that moment, Seran, who was wearing the same attire as Kyle, came to talk to him.

"But are you sure about refusing to become a knight?"

"Yeah, I don't need that position right now."

The truth was that, currently, a knight's position would not only be unnecessary to Kyle, it would actually hinder him.

He would certainly get various privileges if he were to become a knight, but at the same time, he would also have responsibilities and obligations towards Jirgus, which would restrain his actions.

Due to his goals, it was absolutely impossible for Kyle to stick to the country of Jirgus only. From here on out, he also had to start spreading his name in other countries, and among other races.

For the time being, getting a medal and raising his fame in Jirgus was enough for Kyle.

"You look very good everyone."

Princess Milena joined the group in the antechamber.

She was also wearing a white ceremonial dress. She looked beautiful and was displaying an elegance and nobility fitting of her title as the "Treasure of Jirgus".

"If possible, I really want you to not only receive the medal, but to also become knights of Jirgus..."

"To be more precise, I want you to become my knights" Added princess

Milena in her mind.

Kyle and his companions knew about one of Jirgus' big scandals.

So, if possible, she wanted to keep them under her, bound by the collar called "status", plus she was well aware of their capabilities.

It was a fortunate, in a way, that there were now some open positions in the royal guard, for that meant that Kyle and the others could be made into knights in the name of reinforcing the troops.

Especially Kyle, who had enough skill to beat Zentos in a one-on-one fight.

Furthermore, princess Milena's intuition made her feel like there was something about him that was different from other people, so she wanted him to work for her no matter what.

However, she could not be forceful with the group since they had saved her, moreover, she was well aware that, even if they were to go far away, they were not the kind of people who would foolishly reveal the assassination attempt to others.

So, the princess came to the conclusion that, for now, it was all right to just build a relationship with them.

"No, that would be too much, wouldn't it? Besides, the money we've receiving for this is plenty enough as a reward."

Kyle was going to receive a monetary reward together with his medal. Although such a sum was not significant anymore to Kyle and his companions, they still decided to gratefully accept it since it would have been suspicious if they were to refuse even that.

"I see, I suppose you all have your own circumstances."

"Circumstances? That's a pretty heavy term, we really don't have any particularly important reason for this."

"Oh, really? But...."

After saying that, a devil-like smile appeared on the princess' face, as she tentatively gazed at Kyle.

"But, you see, you said that all of you saw me in Archen on the day before the attack happened. So, you either left Archen on that day or the day after, but either way... Isn't it a little bit unnatural that you just happened to be at that place, at that time, on that road that only leads to the Sanes village?"

“And I’ve already confirmed that you haven’t even been to the Sanes village ever since then”, followed up the princess with a small laugh.

"Ah, hmm..."

Kyle instinctively opened his mouth.

Seeing Kyle’s state, princess Milena once again laughed, but this time more childishly.

"For now, I’ll just have to be satisfied with having seen you make such a face. However, if you can, please do tell me your story some other time."

“Well then, we’ll see each other at the ceremony” With those words, princess Milena gracefully bowed and then left.

"For some reason, I feel like that was actually a warning..."

Said Kyle to himself, with a slightly cramped smile.

The big double door opened to a room that was filled with a huge audience. Inside, there were many pillars made entirely of marble, and each of them had finely detailed decorations. On the walls, there were tapestries which depicted some of Jirgus’ stories and legends, as well as portraits of all the kings who had succeeded the throne. And close to the ceiling was a flag with many of the knights’ and nobles’ family crests embroidered on it.

There was a red carpet that started from the door until an elevated pedestal at the other end of the room. A throne had been placed on the pedestal and king Raymond was standing there together with princess Milena, who was smiling by his side.

Furthermore, some of the palaces’s other important people were also at the king’s sides, such as ministers and court magicians, and standing on the surrounding carpet were the knights and nobles who served the palace. Had this been a ceremony to reward a knight or a noble, things would have been different, but since only a mere honorary medal was being awarded, most of these people were looking at this favorably.

Following the etiquette that he had been taught about beforehand, Kyle stood up in front of king Raymond.

"Kyle Leonard, despite being only a citizen of the Jirgus country, you and your party have rescued princess Milena. This is indeed an act worthy of the

kingdom's gratitude. Therefore, you shall be granted this medal of Saint Randenale."

"...I'm honored to accept it."

Around Kyle's neck, King Raymond put a medal that was decorated with a lily flower made of gold, which was the symbol that represented saint Randenale. After watching that, princess Milena started applauding, and a round of applause followed suit from the surrounding people.

"The hope of humanity", "The master of the sword and magic.", "The lustful hero" It was at this moment that the great hero Kyle Leonard, who would receive many names in the future, first stepped onto the front stage of history.

From that instant, a new saga began, the saga of the hero named Kyle.

Epilogue

On the night after the medal awarding ceremony, king Raymond was on the top floor of his palace, drinking by himself in a dimly lit room.

Due to his position as the king, he would rarely find himself alone like this. However, for the last few days, the palace's chamberlain, who was aware of the latest events, had been making sure that no one would come to disturb the king at night.

The reality was that King Raymond's feelings were in disarray, and he was drowning his desolation in his first-class wine. It would have been only natural for him to feel angry after having sent his son in exile — But that was, in fact, not the case.

"Be it Carenas or Zentos, they were both completely useless in the end!"

The true source of the king's anger was his failure to assassinate the princess.

Whether it was inside or outside the country, king Raymond's reputation was not bad at all.

He had never done anything particularly grand nor had he ever committed any particularly big mistake, and he was doing a smooth job managing the country's military affairs, the domestic affairs, and foreign affairs. Many of the nation's people were satisfied with his rule.

'A normal king with his some good and some bad sides', that was the people's evaluation of king Raymond.

But precisely because he was a capable king to some extent, he was well aware of how extraordinary his daughter was.

She had been smart from a very young age, and she had perfectly assimilated everything that she had been taught about how to be a good leader.

Knowing that various things in the future would be much easier for her if she were to become popular, Milenia had skillfully made use of her status as the princess, which was a role that was relatively light on responsibilities, in order to come in contact with the nation's people and earn some fame with them.

Thanks to that, she now was very popular indeed. Much more than the king himself.

Lately, she had gradually started involving herself with the country's politics. Even though her range of actions was limited for now since she was only the next heir to the throne, she was still achieving some results, little by little. At this rate, in less than five years, she was likely going to make the king step down from his throne and to take his place as the country's queen. Moreover, it was going to be a peaceful process as everyone in the country would be satisfied with her ascension. Then, Jirgus was probably going to develop itself and grow well under the rule of the beautiful queen.

At any rate, there was no doubt that Milena would be a queen whose name would go down in history. As for the king, he was going to lose his political career upon her ascension, and to be left behind in the past. He was 38 years old, and even in five years, he would be still only be 43. His daughter would have no difficulty to destroy what he had been building for the past 10 or 20 years, and she would then build something even better over the rubble of his forgotten legacy. Moreover, the way things were going, the king was only going to be treated and recognized as 'Milena's father' at that point. He, who had been dreaming from a young age to become a great king who would be remembered by the people, was going to be buried down in history.... As Milena had been growing, this possibility had been heavily weighing on the king's mind and making him more and more anxious. Then, one day, he finally came to a certain decision.

"Milena's methods are too drastic. In the future, I'm sure she's going to drive the whole country into a crisis."

Using this pretext, he lied to himself and made up his mind to disinherit the princess. However, it was impossible for him publicly punish her. Because the princess had committed no mistakes so far. With this matter, half measures would surely result in retaliations.

That being the case, an assassination was the only solution, but that was too risky.

If he were to fail and his attempt were to be exposed, that would likely result in a civil war which would divide the whole country, and in that scenario, the king's chances of success were thin.

Therefore, the king's eyes had fallen on his other child, prince Carenas.

Even from his father's own perspective, Carenas was a fool, therefore, he was easy to understand as an individual and the king could manipulate him as he wished.

Hence why the king had used Zentos to incite Carenas to attack his own little sister.

Even though these kinds of aspirations were originally completely beyond the prince, he still immediately felt like killing Milena upon being incited to do it, without knowing that he was being manipulated.

But even if Carenas had succeeded, the king had had no intention to make him his successor.

There were many people who had the royal family's blood in their veins despite not being direct descendants of the king, so he could simply choose his successor among them.

However, the prince had turned out to be even more foolish than expected. The king had made various preparations, such as assigning Zentos to him and separating Milena from the the fifth corps' knights, who were escorting her, and yet Carenas had still failed to kill his little sister.

"Still, that Zentos... Even though I favored him, if he was going to die anyway, he might as well have directly killed the princess beforehand."

Although the king had told him that he would, of course, cover the whole matter afterwards, Zentos had still been particular about not wanting to be too high-handed, and about making the princess die from an accident instead. "You should have just killed her directly from the very start", Said the king angrily.

"Right now, it doesn't seem like anybody is suspecting me, but I have to think of another plan soon before anyone starts realizing what's really going on... Seriously, why did those travelers have to put their noses where it doesn't

belong....."

The king recalled the medal awarding ceremony which had taken place earlier in the day.

‘Since these people are aware of the assassination attempt, they have to be dealt with as soon as possible. If possible, maybe I could kill them together with the princess and...’ As king Raymond thought so, he finished his cup of wine in one gulp, and at that moment, his hair swayed.

"Hmm? ...Was it the wind?"

When the king looked around him, believing that there was no way the wind would blow in this closed-up room, his eyes fell on the room’s unlit fireplace, in front of which there was someone standing.

That man was dressed all in black, and only his eyes could be seen on his concealed face. He was as suspicious as he could possibly be.

However, this place was in the residential area of the royal palace, and more precisely, this was the king’s bedroom, it was the safest place in all of Jirgus.

“No intruders are allowed here, and there is no way an intruder would be able to come in anyway.” That was the king’s thought process, which was limited by his drunkenness.

The man instantly approached the side of king Raymond, and went behind him. Then, he twisted both of his arms around the king and used his hands to seal his mouth, therefore rendering the king unable to move or speak in the span of a moment.

Faced with those movements that the man was clearly accustomed to, king Raymond, who knew nothing about martial arts, was not able to resist.

"Wondering how anyone could come here without facing any obstacles? It’s simple, really. You know that secret passage behind the fireplace that leads to the royal capital? Well, I came from there."

A small voice whispered behind the king’s ear. Although the king knew he had heard it before, he could not recall where that was.

Indeed, behind the room’s fireplace, there was an emergency escape passage that was connected to the royal capital.

However, that information was held in absolute secrecy. The exit was extremely

well hidden, and the only living person who knew about it was the king himself.

"I once escorted you from there when the palace fell to the enemy... Seriously, at that time, I went out of my way to escort a bastard like you, and just to save your life I...Well, I guess it's thanks to you that I know of this passage now, so there is that at least."

"I suppose at this point, I should just be happy that it wasn't all for nothing" Muttered the intruder.

Not quite understanding what the man was talking about, the king, who was being restrained, was focused on desperately struggling to free himself, but to no avail.

"It's really fortunate you were drinking here by yourself. I was planning to come back several more times to wait for an opportunity in case today seemed no good, but that won't be necessary... I wonder, is karma rewarding me or punishing you?"

Said ironically the intruder, who was none other than Kyle. In order to avoid influencing the medal awarding ceremony, Kyle had been waiting until today to come here, but it seemed like he had not made the wrong choice.

"Naturally, you want to know why I'm doing this, don't you? I have various reasons, but still, I don't exactly have a personal grudge against you, though I suppose I'm kind of venting my anger on you."

Hearing that the intruder was just venting on him, the king groaned angrily, however, Kyle did not seem to care.

"It's useless to tell you about that now, but during the 'big invasion', even though I advised you to immediately go to the rescue of the dwarfs in the neighboring country, you made the political decision of delaying your rescue and waiting until they fell into a crisis before helping them, in order to seize an advantage for yourself. But the attack of the demons' troops was far above your expectations, and in the blink of an eye, the dwarfs were already done for."

Back then, Kyle was only a skilled magic swordsman who had slightly spread his name, and he was treated accordingly.

As a survivor of the Limaze town, he had desperately appealed to how big and dreadful of a threat the demon army was at that time, but the king had not paid much attention to his words.

"That defeat caused a ripple effect which eventually led the Jirgus country to its demise. You kept coming up with one stupid plan after another until you were cornered, at which point you started dodging responsibility..."

As he said that, Kyle let out large sigh that came from the bottom of his heart.

"Seriously, I wish you'd been stronger and had gotten your act together in those days. Maybe then I wouldn't have had to go through so much trouble... It was because there were so many leaders like you that we had to suffer through all those hardships."

Perhaps because he was filled with anger, or because he was recalling his unbearable past, Kyle put more strength into his hands and arms which were twisted around king Raymond.

The king groaned loudly from the pain.

"Oh, sorry. I guess it's meaningless to tell you all of that now... Besides, I never planned to do anything to you for something you haven't even done yet... But if you're going to protect yourself by manipulating your son and making him try to kill your own daughter due to your personal jealousy, then it's a whole other story. I don't need to hold back against you."

Kyle tightened his arms and hands even further, and started walking while pushing the king with him.

"But, above all, you went and gave that kind of order to my old comrade in arms, and you made me kill him. That I cannot forgive."

Zentos' last words were "I have failed you, your majesty". The moment he had heard that, Kyle was able to understand everything. Moreover, he had confirmed his suspicions when he was eavesdropping on the king earlier and had heard him speak to himself.

"It's simple when you think about it. As ridiculously serious and loyal as Zentos was, there is only one person who'd have been able to make him assassinate the princess... and that person is none other than you, your majesty."

After you died and the Jirgus country disappeared for good, Zentos seemed oddly refreshed, as if a heavy rock had been lifted from his shoulders... If only he could have chosen the country of his birth, and the king he would serve."

Step by step, Kyle was approaching the room's window, which was connected to a balcony.

Realizing what Kyle was about to do, the king struggled violently but uselessly.

"You really went all out to hide that whole matter back then. It seems like, no matter how much they investigated, it only looked like an accidental death to them..."

Kyle smiled wryly as he recalled his former spy friend who had been full of confidence when declaring that the princess had died of an accident.

"Well, that princess is sort of devious, but she's smart. She's probably going to give priority to benefits rather than feelings and emotions when leading the country, but she will still be better than a king like you who only thinks of saving his own neck, so I can't let you kill her. Besides, after killing the princess, you'd probably have made us your next targets since we know of the country's secret, right? ...So, I'm sorry but this is where it ends for you, no hard feelings."

Kyle quietly opened the room's large window, allowing the night wind to enter inside.

"Also, the princess would normally have taken over you in 3 years, more or less. So, it doesn't really matter if I make that happen a bit earlier, right?"

King Raymond was feeling an immeasurable fear as Kyle was indifferently talking about his death like it was already decided. The king started struggling and groaning even more, but that did not stop Kyle who continued to walk forward.

"Oops, I've been talking for a little too long, haven't I? It'd be pretty bad if I lose any more time."

The two men arrived at the balcony's railing. During daytime, this balcony would give a good view on the palace's courtyard, but right now, in the dark of the night, there was only darkness to be seen. This was the fifth and top floor of the royal palace, and under here was a stone

pavement. Falling from this balcony would leave the victim no chances of survival.

"Don't worry, I'll make this look like an accident, I won't tell anyone that you tried to kill your own daughter, so your honor will be safe after your death... Oh, and, I'd be troubled if you start screaming, so I'll have to do this beforehand."

After saying that, Kyle dealt a knifehand strike on the back of the king's neck. It was a light blow, but it hit the right spot and was aimed well enough to make the king pass out.

"So long, your majesty."

As his consciousness was being wrapped in darkness, those were the last words the king heard before losing his life.

That night, some patrolling soldiers heard a loud sound towards which they immediately rushed, only to find that king Raymond had fallen to his death. There were no traces of an intruder in his room, and it seemed like he had been severely drunk, so it had been assumed that he had gone out to his balcony to let the night wind sober him up, and had then accidentally fallen down. In the end, since telling the public that the king had drunkenly fallen from his balcony would have tarnished his reputation, it had been officially announced that he had perished from a sudden heart attack.